

GUIDELINES FOR APPROVING COURSES TO FULFILL THE BREADTH REQUIREMENT IN AMERICAN CULTURES

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Drafted by the AC Subcommittee, 2003-2004

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In 1989, the Special Committee on Education and Ethnicity recommended the establishment of an American Cultures Breadth Requirement for all undergraduates at the University of California, Berkeley. The report of the Committee, known as the Simmons Report, proposed that “a wide variety of disciplines establish courses that focus on major themes in United States history, society, and culture and that address the major conceptual issues relevant to understanding ethnicity, culture, race, and pluralism in the American context. Such courses should provide the intellectual tools to understand better one’s own particular cultural identity and those of others in their terms. They should take substantial account of those racial minority groups such as African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Chicanos/Latinos that have not only been excluded from the mainstream of American society, but continue to be underrepresented in our mainstream curriculum.”

In response to the Simmons Report, the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate passed Regulation 300, which established the requirement, set forth guidelines for courses that would satisfy it, and created the Subcommittee on the Breadth Requirement in American Cultures¹ to facilitate, assess, and approve course proposals based on those guidelines. In order to encourage courses that engage students in ways that prepare them to live in and contribute to a multicultural society, the Subcommittee interprets the guidelines, and approves courses, based on the following:

A. Does the course address theoretical and analytical issues relevant to understanding race, culture, and ethnicity?

What may be considered to be of theoretical and analytical relevance to the understanding of race, culture, and ethnicity varies across disciplines and even within them. The Subcommittee does not apply a fixed standard for determining relevance, and is interested in promoting new approaches that diversify the study of these topics. For example, we welcome courses that analyze how class, gender, or the cultures of science (or of different professions) intersect with questions of race and ethnicity; and we are receptive to courses that fulfill the intent of the requirement within limits set by disciplinary norms.

¹ Berkeley Division Regulation 300 established that the AC Subcommittee would be comprised of seven faculty members and two undergraduate students, and would function as a subcommittee of the Berkeley Division’s Committee on Educational Policy (CEP). The AC Subcommittee Chair serves as an ex-officio member of CEP.

B. Is the course integrative and comparative within the larger context of American society, history, culture, economy, or environment?

Courses should focus on groups within the U.S. or in relation to the U.S. The Subcommittee welcomes comparative international frameworks and the study of historical formations relevant to the issues of race and ethnicity in the U.S.

Courses must integrate the groups within a well-reasoned conceptual, thematic, or historical framework. The Subcommittee recognizes the difficulty of defining criteria that apply across the board to courses in different disciplines and that use different perspectives. It intends to be flexible when considering each proposal.

C. Does the course take substantial account of groups drawn from at least three of the following: African Americans, indigenous peoples of the United States, Asian Americans, Chicanos/Latinos, and European Americans?

Since the inception of the requirement in 1989, new research has revealed ever-growing complexity within and among these groups and has demonstrated the heterogeneity of American society. In order to ensure that the vitality of cutting-edge research continues to benefit American Cultures courses, the Subcommittee interprets this guideline as follows:

American Cultures courses must consider racial/cultural groups drawn from at least three of the named major groups. Instructors may focus on particular subgroups within the major groups; focus on a combination of subgroups and major groups; or go outside the named groups, when guidelines A and B are best served by doing so, to address other racial/ethnic groups that have been excluded historically from the mainstream of society and curriculum.

Other Policies

1. Courses must be three or more units.
2. Courses devoted to development of general skills—e.g., 1A or 1B reading and composition courses—are not eligible for American Cultures approval.
3. When an approved course is offered in sections that use different material, the Subcommittee must approve each section.
4. When the instructor of an approved course changes, the new instructor must submit his or her version of the course for Subcommittee review.

Approval Procedure

Faculty members submit a course proposal for approval of an American Cultures course to the Subcommittee on the Breadth Requirement in American Cultures. Send the proposal and all supporting material to the Subcommittee on the Breadth Requirement in American Cultures at 320 Stephens Hall #5842. The Subcommittee will notify you in writing about the action it takes on the proposal. Please call the Senate staff to the subcommittee at (510) 642-4340 for advice or facilitation.

Subcommittee on the Breadth Requirement in American Cultures

Proposal

A proposal for course approval includes a **syllabus** and a **cover letter** explaining how the course satisfies the requirement.

The **syllabus** should be complete, detailed, and as final as possible. It should include an informative course description, a determinate reading list (specifying author and title), and a schedule of assignments for the whole semester.

In the **cover letter**, describe your course, being sure to address the requirement's criteria described above. Explain how your selected groups are integrated into the topic of the course, or how the course topic frames your conceptualization and presentation of the groups. You may help the Subcommittee by explaining how specific readings relate to the intent of the course, especially if the content of these readings is unclear from their titles alone.

In cases where the Subcommittee has questions about a course proposal, the Subcommittee will work with the instructor on revisions. The Subcommittee encourages you to seek information from the staff of the American Cultures Center in drafting your course proposal. Please call Victoria Robinson at (510) 642-2264, send email to americancultures@berkeley.edu, or visit the Center at 120 Wheeler Hall.

These guidelines can be found online on the American Cultures Center's website, <http://americancultures.berkeley.edu>, and the Subcommittee's Senate website, <http://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/committees/amcult/amcult.html>.

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The American Cultures Breadth Requirement offers a special opportunity for innovation in teaching and research at Berkeley. It has the potential to include the full range of campus academic endeavors and to provide exciting opportunities for cross-fertilization among fields. Workshops and periodic seminars for American Cultures instructors bring faculty into vitalizing discussions that participants view as unique experiences in campus life. Please consider participation, and thank you for supporting the American Cultures Breadth Requirement.