

Guidelines for Proposing Courses to Fulfill the Breadth Requirement in American Cultures^[1]

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 own terms. They should take substantial account of those racial minority groups such as African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Chicanos/Latinos” that have been underrepresented in our curriculum.

In response to the Simmons Report in 1989, the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate passed Regulation 300, which established the requirement. To support the regulation, the Academic Senate created the Subcommittee on the Breadth Requirement in American Cultures (AMCULT) to facilitate, assess, and approve course proposals based on Regulation 300 and who, at a later date, created a set of review guidelines. Senate bylaws established that AMCULT would be comprised of seven faculty members and two student representatives, and would function as a subcommittee of the Berkeley Division’s Committee on Educational Policy (CEP). Since 3 November 2010 AMCULT has functioned as a subcommittee of the Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI). The AMCULT Chair serves as an *ex officio* voting member of COCI. The Subcommittee interprets Regulation 300 based on the criteria below. Instructors should take into account these guidelines when submitting their course proposals.

Bold-faced text below presents the language of Regulation 300 in the form of three broad criteria, followed by the AC guidelines.

A. 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 AC requirement in 1989, research has revealed an ever-growing complexity within and among the groups listed above and has demonstrated the heterogeneity of

¹ Originally drafted by the American Cultures Subcommittee (AMCULT) in 2003-2004, endorsed by the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) on 25 February 2004. Further revised by AMCULT in fall 2005 and reviewed by CEP on 8 March 2006. Endorsed by Divisional Council (DIVCO) on 3 April 2006. Further revisions by AMCULT in 2017-2018 and endorsed by the Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI) on 23 March 2018 with endorsement by DIVCO on 19 March 2018.

American society. The intent of criterion A is not to endorse a checklist approach to the consideration of racial, cultural, and ethnic categories, but to examine critically these categories, above all their perceived naturalness and fixity, and to encourage broad representation. Intersectional considerations that cut across these categories are increasingly relevant, for instance questions pertaining to gender identity, sexuality, legal status, economic class, religion, ability, and other racial, cultural, and ethnic affiliations. Further articulations of these categories are examined in B and C below.

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

Recognizing that 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 in disciplines beyond American Cultures. For example, we welcome courses that analyze how questions of race, culture, and ethnicity, as described above in A, intersect with the cultures of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or with those of different fields and professions within and beyond the humanities and the social sciences. At the same time, it is essential that courses offered under the AC label be distinctive within the UC Berkeley curriculum and that they be recognizable as AC-eligible. Highlighting theoretical and analytical frameworks that explore questions of race, culture, and ethnicity in field-specific ways can help to ensure relevance to the AC curriculum.

C. Does the course emphasize “integrative and comparative” approaches to questions of race, culture, and ethnicity within the larger context of American society and history?

Instructors should bear in mind that courses appropriate to fulfilling the AC requirement are not standard courses that additively incorporate questions of racial diversity while adhering to their disciplinary boundaries and interests. Rather, they are courses that specifically address questions of race, culture, and ethnicity as their guiding framework. Courses should contextualize these questions by focusing on groups within the U.S. (and/or in relation to the U.S.) and on the shared or disparate experiences of the groups named in A above. However, the Subcommittee welcomes comparative global and transnational perspectives, provided that they highlight the larger forces that impinge on the historical and social landscape of the U.S.

Other Policies

1. Courses must be three or more semester units.

2. Courses devoted to development of general skills—e.g., courses that fulfill the Reading and Composition Requirement—are not eligible for American Cultures approval.
3. When the instructor of an approved course changes, the new instructor must submit their version of the course to the Subcommittee for approval.
4. When an approved course is offered with a significantly modified syllabus, the Subcommittee must approve the updated syllabus.

Approval Procedure

Instructors submit a course proposal for AC approval to the Subcommittee on the Breadth Requirement in American Cultures. Send the proposal and all supporting material to the Subcommittee via the Academic Senate in 320 Stephens Hall, MC# 5842. The Subcommittee will notify in writing the decision it makes on the proposal. Questions about procedures may be directed to Senate staff.

Proposal

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

The **syllabus** should be as complete, detailed, and final as possible. It should include an informative course description, a determinate reading list (specifying author and title, and page number where relevant), and a schedule of assignments for the whole semester. The Subcommittee prefers that this be accomplished by means of a week-by-week schedule in the syllabus that provides the week's topic, assignments, and readings, in addition to a narrative description that demonstrates how the AC requirement is woven into the course. Syllabi that accomplish this in another way (e.g., unit-by-unit or topic-by-topic) are similarly acceptable, provided that the relevance of the assignments to the AC requirement is clearly legible.

The **cover letter** should describe the course, while addressing the criteria described above. It should explain how the selected racial, cultural, and/or ethnic groups are integrated into the topic of the course; how the course topic frames the conceptualization and presentation of the groups; and if and how the syllabus departs from standard syllabi within the instructor's discipline. Explaining how specific readings related to the intent of the course, especially if the content of these reading is unclear from their titles alone, may help the Subcommittee in its deliberations.

The Subcommittee encourages instructors to seek assistance in developing course proposals from the American Cultures Center staff, located in 360 Stephens Hall, MC# 1050. In cases where the

Subcommittee has questions about a course proposal and deems that revision is needed, the Subcommittee will provide feedback in writing to help instructors prepare revisions prior to resubmitting the course.

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

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 instructors and faculty into discussions that participants view as unique experiences in campus life. Please consider participation, and thank you for supporting the American Cultures Breadth Requirement.

Version 03/02/2018. This version supersedes any older versions.