

Proposal to Remove European Traditions *Category* from UCSB's General Education Requirements

by Prof. Harold Marcuse, History, April 20, 2021

Proposal: To combine the UCSB General Education “European Traditions” Special Subject Area Requirement with the “World Cultures” Special Subject Area Requirement, retaining the name “World Cultures” for the combined category of courses. All courses currently approved as fulfilling “European Traditions” will be approved as fulfilling “World Cultures.”

The requirement's current "Objective" will be modified as follows:

"To learn to identify, understand, and appreciate the history, thought, and practices of one or more world culture ~~outside of the European tradition.~~"

This change shall be implemented as soon as possible.

The proposal at hand seeks merely to combine the two Special Subject Area requirements “European Traditions” and “World Cultures” (now coded EUR and NWC—the latter a legacy from its prior definition as “Non-Western Culture”) into the single category “World Cultures.” Instead of requiring one course from each of the two current categories, two courses would be required from this single combined category, so there would be no numerical change in the requirements.

(Note: The BFA and BM General Education requirements already do not require any EUR courses, just one in World Cultures. Thus the catalog text indicating that they do not require EUR could be deleted.)

Background: For decades—since at least 2002--UCSB's special emphasis on “Western Civilization” in its General Education requirements has been an embarrassment to many members of our faculty. Although its complete removal was proposed at that time, only a renaming and reduction of the requirement was ultimately implemented in the 2005 GE reform. Euphemistically renamed “European Traditions,” it was reduced from two courses from a highly restricted list, to one course from a much broader list of courses.¹ In early 2020, already prior to the heightened awareness of institutional White supremacy after the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, students were working on a petition to remove this requirement. In the wake of those murders this University and a number of its departments have released pledges to combat anti-Blackness in our curriculum. This proposal is one obvious and simple way of reducing the White supremacy embedded in our curriculum.

Our GE program now consists of taking a specified number of courses (13 total for a BA, 9 for a BS, 7 for a BFA or BM²) from each of five “general” disciplinary categories (C-G³). Some of those courses (along with a few others) also fulfill a further five “special” subject requirements, namely—listed in the catalog in this order:⁴ 1) requiring writing, 2) analyzing the “significance in world affairs [of a] European culture,” 3) examining a “culture outside of the European Tradition,” 4) teaching quantitative relationships, and 5) focusing on the experience of “HISTORICALLY [caps in catalog] oppressed and excluded racial minorities in the United States.”

¹ A detailed documentation of the discussions of the "Western Civilization" requirement at UCSB from 1985 to 2004 can be found at: <http://ge.projects.history.ucsb.edu/WCivResponses022.htm>.

² <https://my.sa.ucsb.edu/catalog/Current/CollegesDepartments/Is-intro/GERequirements.aspx>. The links for each degree are at the bottom of the page.

³ <https://my.sa.ucsb.edu/catalog/Current/UndergraduateEducation/GeneralSubjectAreaRequirements.aspx>.

⁴ <https://my.sa.ucsb.edu/catalog/Current/UndergraduateEducation/SpecialSubjectAreaRequirements.aspx>.

Rationale. The removal of this requirement from UCSB's general education curriculum brings us into line with the current standards across the UC system (and at most if not all of our comparison schools as well). Because of the broad diversity of approaches to "general education," "distribution," or "breadth" requirements across campuses, it is difficult to compare them. However, a rough synoptic table with hyperlinks to the relevant catalog pages for UC campuses is included in an appended document. No other UC campus has any remotely similar requirement focusing on Europe (or "the West"). Some faculty have suggested that we go further in decolonizing and modernizing our GE curriculum. Since those changes would require lengthy consultation, we are not considering them at this time, so we can focus on this most obvious, urgent and simple change.

Impact on Students. The effect on students will be minimal. Instead of having to choose one course from each of the two categories, they would be able to choose two courses from the combined list of courses, giving them greater flexibility (B.A. and B.S. students only; BFA and BM students currently do not have an EUR requirement). While some students might choose both courses from the EUR list, thereby circumventing the previous stipulation of a "non-European" culture, this is not necessarily a detriment: an in-depth exposure to the culture of one world region brings with it benefits as well, especially for students who already have a deeper grounding in a non-European culture. Also, students considering study abroad in Europe could benefit from increased knowledge of the culture of their target country.

Enrollments. To assess the possible impact on enrollments, we Institutional Research has compiled five years of enrollment rates of all (and all lower division) courses on each list, with more detailed data for the 7 departments offering courses listed in the pre-2005 GE subcategory E-1, "Western Civilization."⁵ Since the enrollment rates in EUR and NWC courses are roughly comparable (aggregate enrollments are sometimes higher in one, sometimes in the other), substantial shifts are unlikely. We would actually hope that some enrollment would shift to non-EUR World Cultures courses, since the main purpose of this proposal is to reduce our institutional privileging of "the West." The data broken down by major is more difficult to interpret, but is provided for each department to analyze.

Departments with Survey Courses Designed to Fulfill the European Traditions Requirement:⁶

ARTHI 6ABC - Art Survey: Ancient-Medieval; Renaissance-Baroque; Modern-Contemporary Art

CLASS 20AB and 40 - Ancient Greeks; Romans; Greek Mythology

C LIT 30ABC - Major Works in European Literature

FR 50ABCX / C LIT 50ABC - Tales of Love in the Western Tradition

HIST 4ABC - Ancient Mediterranean; Medieval and Early Modern Europe; Modern Europe

MUS 10ABC - History of Western Music from Early Modern Culture through Modernism

PHIL 20ABC - History of Philosophy

RG ST 80ABC - Religion and Western Civilization: Ancient; Medieval; Modern

The History Department, which renamed its "Western Civilization" survey in 2018, unanimously endorsed this proposal in March 2021; the other department chairs have been apprised of the proposal and were asked in mid-April to solicit feedback from their faculty.

⁵ See the listing in the 2004-05 UCSB General Catalog, p. 114: https://archive.org/details/cusb-ld781-s3_u55_2004-05/page/114/mode/2up. (MUS 10 was added in 2015-16, enrolling ca. 25-35 students quarterly. Historical enrollment data is available at <https://my.sa.ucsb.edu/public/CourseOfferingHistory.aspx>.)

⁶ <https://my.sa.ucsb.edu/catalog/Current/UndergraduateEducation/EurTradCourses.aspx>.