

Criteria for 300-level Group-satisfying courses

Taken from Motion US03/04-8

Sponsored by: Undergraduate Council

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300-level Group-satisfying courses are expected to serve as broad introductions to fields with which students are unfamiliar, but they must also provide depth and rigor beyond that of a typical lower-division course. To achieve this dual purpose, such courses should do the following.

- a. Introduce students to the perspectives of a discipline and engage them in substantial application of its fundamental ideas. Courses may be focused on a single text or period, but should use the examples provided by that focus to illuminate the larger discipline. &
 - b. Educate students about the way knowledge is created in a discipline by identifying its significant questions and showing how those questions can be answered. For instance, a course might analyze the design of particular experiments, show how modeling is done and when it is informative, or introduce specific kinds of data analysis. The use of primary sources is encouraged where appropriate & that is, in fields where this information is accessible to a non-specialist. &
 - c. Encourage integration of perspectives, as well as specific application of general principles, through synthesis and analysis of course material, including concepts from other courses. These courses should also employ evaluation methods that measure this high level of understanding. &
 - d. Assume that students are capable of advanced university-level intellectual engagement as a result of having completed substantial lower-division work, although not necessarily in the subject of the course. Some upper-division Group-satisfying courses may also have specific prerequisites in the form of other courses whose content provides an essential foundation in the subject.
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Background for the Motion

In 1999, the Senate passed legislation detailing criteria and guidelines for Group-satisfying courses, as well as a Purpose Statement for General Education at the UO. In 2001, these criteria were amended and the roles of curricular committees were clarified. The current motion does not fundamentally change the criteria; rather the intent is to amplify them in order to promote more widespread understanding of them

by both faculty and students, and to insure that course formats are compatible with the goals of Group-satisfying coursework.

The Undergraduate Council is charged with "reviewing, evaluating and enhancing the quality of the University's academic program for undergraduates." The charge includes monitoring the academic coherence, quality, and standards of the undergraduate academic program and participating in planning the development and improvement of the undergraduate program. We were asked by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies to undertake a review of the current Group- satisfying curriculum (excluding B.S. Math and B.A. Language requirements), beginning with an assessment of its congruence with legislated criteria. A systematic comparison of existing courses with the Group criteria has not been undertaken previously.

Based on its review of the syllabi from both lower-division and 300-level courses, the Council concluded that most lower-division Group-satisfying courses are appropriate for the Group curriculum and meet the legislated guidelines. Our recommendations (#1-3) regarding 100- and 200-level Group courses concern format and procedures that will allow a wider audience to appreciate the fundamental ideas that Group-satisfying courses deal with. Most importantly, the proposed changes will help faculty communicate to students why these courses are part of our General Education curriculum.

The Council's review of 300-level Group courses revealed that more specific guidelines are needed to illuminate what is meant by "depth and rigor beyond that of typical lower- division general education courses," which is the only guidance provided in the 2001 criteria. In Point #4., the Council proposes fuller descriptions of the desired characteristics of Group-satisfying courses at the 300 level.

Addendum to the Motion

Examples of hypothetical course designs that manifest desired characteristics

a. through c. of 300-level Group-satisfying courses:

a. Introduce students to the perspectives of a discipline and engage them in substantial application of its fundamental ideas:

1. In a Humanities course, the political, economic and religious influences on particular artists might be used to examine the kinds of forces that shape personal taste and distinctive artistic style in all periods and places.

2. In a Literature course, texts from a specific period, genre, or individual might serve to represent larger cultural trends and developments.

3. A course on Environmental Economics would further develop the tools and analytical techniques introduced in "principles courses," and would show how analytical tools applicable to economics, generally, can be applied to environmental issues.

4. A History course might deal with a short time period, but use it to illustrate patterns of social interaction that can be generalized.

5. A Biology course might use a specific disease (Mad Cow, for example) to explore the fundamental molecular and genetic principles that explain both the disease and normal cellular function

b. Educate students about the way knowledge is created in a discipline by identifying its significant questions and showing how those questions can be answered:

1. In the Humanities course on style, students would use a textbook, but would also study paintings, sculptures, buildings and musical compositions directly, in an effort to identify common elements of style.

2. Students in a Literature course might be called upon not only to exercise interpretive and analytical skills, but also to explore the material and ideological circumstances that contribute to the production of literary texts in a given time and place.

3. In the Economics course, students would take the fundamental microeconomic concepts and tools used by economists and policy-makers and apply them to a specific problem. Texts, homework assignments, and lectures would all be used to demonstrate how to apply these tools. As an example, students might use models of consumer and producer behavior to predict the economic effects of regulating the price of oil.

4. A History course would use primary documents for at least part of the course material. For instance, a course on the US involvement in Vietnam might ask students to read a major US news paper covering a crucial period and try to reconstruct the relationships among: the news reports, public opinion, and events as they are now understood.

5. The Mad Cow course might examine the experimental logic that led to the heretical idea that proteins, not viruses, cause the disease. Textbooks would be used to present fundamental cellular mechanisms, but students would also read popular science articles (e.g., Scientific American articles by the investigators who had key insights) and a few primary research papers to get a sense of the evidence and reasoning behind scientific conclusions.

c. Encourage integration of perspectives, as well as specific application of general principles, through synthesis and analysis of course material, including concepts from other courses:

1. The Humanities course might ask students to summarize the key ideas in Leonard Meyer's essay, "A Theory of Style" and then apply these to a particular art form or an individual piece of creative work.
2. Students in a Literature course might be expected to apply various analytical paradigms, such as a Marxist, Post-Structuralist, or Feminist framework, in their critical writing about literary texts.
3. The Economics course might ask students to apply the tools they've been working with to a problem they haven't analyzed before. For example, having looked at the effects of oil price regulation, a student might be asked to analyze another instance of price regulation, or to put two types of regulation or price distortion together in a way that wasn't covered in class -- e.g. what would happen if a price ceiling and a per unit tax were imposed simultaneously?
4. A History course might ask students to use their understanding of particular philosophical ideas to defend or refute the statement, "Enlightenment philosophy was responsible for the outbreak of the French Revolution."
5. The Mad Cow course might ask students to examine other phenomena that appear related (e.g. Alzheimer's Disease and long term memory) and propose specific molecular mechanisms for them.

Passed by the [12 May 2004](#) meeting of the UO Senate. Implementation delayed until Fall 2004 owing to contractual obligations