

## **CURRICULUM REVIEW APPROACHES**

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### **I. Context**

A broad experience with the methods and results of the most widely-employed approaches to knowledge is considered to be an essential part of General Education. Thus, the Approaches section includes Physical and Life Sciences (two courses), Social and Behavioral Sciences (three courses, of which one in Historical Analysis), and Humanities and Fine Arts (three courses, each one in Philosophical and Moral Reasoning, Literary Arts, and Visual & Performing Arts).

### **II. Committee members and charges**

The committee included Allen Anderson, Art Champagne, Chris Carter Aylim Castro, Suzanne Havala Hobbs, Michele Hoyman, Beth Shuster, Monika Truemper, and Adam Versényi. The committee was asked to consider the six following specific questions and also to review whether courses currently listed as fulfilling the approaches requirement actually meet the relevant requirements.

1. Do Historical Analysis (HS) courses consistently address change over time or should there be a specific history requirement?
2. Do the courses in Philosophical Analysis (PH) contain significant content in ethics or moral reasoning?
3. Is the distinction between Literary Analysis (LA) and Visual & Performing Arts (VP) sufficiently clear, particularly for film courses?
4. Can Arts and Crafts courses fulfill the VP requirement?
5. Is three Social and Behavioral Sciences (SS/HS) courses the appropriate number of courses?
6. How should the criteria be distributed to maintain compliance?

### **III. Communication**

The committee met twice: after the Administrative Board Meeting on March 23; and on April 27, 3-5 pm. Otherwise, the committee communicated by phone, Blackboard (for access to data), and primarily by email.

### **IV. Methods**

The assessment was based on a review of the syllabi of 61 courses that had been selected in order to answer the specific questions and to cover all different areas of Approaches evenly. Courses were selected

according to size, popularity, and times offered: All had been taught in the fall of 2009 and/or the spring of 2010, and most of them commonly have high enrollments, serving many students to fulfill their Approaches requirements. The 61 courses included 12 Physical and Life Sciences (PL) courses with field experience/laboratory requirement (PX) (6 PL/6 PX); 11 Non-Historical Social and Behavioral Sciences (SS) courses; 9 Historical Analysis (HS) courses; 10 Philosophical and Moral Reasoning (PH) courses; 8 Literary Arts (LA); and 11 Visual & Performing Arts (VP) courses.

Most syllabi were reviewed by at least two members of the committee. For the review, a set of criteria was defined based on the General Education Criteria Document. The results were submitted in online rubric sheets on Blackboard which in the end were combined in one excel file. The deadline of June 30 for submitting reviews online was met by all of the committee members.

## **V. Discussion**

The review of syllabi was a straightforward process, and there was overall very little disagreement between reviewers in the assessment of courses. The statistical data in the final excel file provided clear answers to questions nos. 1-3 and conclusive data for the general assessment or approaches courses as well as the discussion of question no. 6. It was not clear to the committee, however, whether the syllabi submitted for current review were identical with those that had originally been submitted to the curriculum committee in 2006 or later. Thus, ambiguities in syllabi may go back to modifications that were made, for example, when instructors of courses changed.

Question no. 4 was only brought forward to the committee after courses had been selected and the review process had begun. Thus, while no Arts and Crafts course was among the selected courses, committee members felt still confident to answer the question based on their knowledge of and experience with these courses.

The committee decided early on in the review process that it cannot evaluate question no. 5 based on any of the available data. It was not clear to the committee first, what the appropriate number of SS/HS courses should; and second, why SS/HS was singled out among the approaches requirements, and why it was not proposed to increase Humanities and Fine Arts courses (also three) or Physical and Life Sciences courses (only two). Therefore, it was agreed that this question goes far beyond a review of the implementation of the curriculum's Approaches component and can only be assessed on a higher level, notably by a committee discussing the balance between all different General Education requirements.

## VI. Recommendations

Since similar problems arose both in the assessment of the specific questions and Approaches courses in general, recommendations regard all Approaches courses, while still referring to specific questions where appropriate.

- Assuming that the curriculum committee approved all syllabi that were reviewed by this committee (see above), it should in future control more closely that all requirements as outlined in the Criteria Document are really met. It should set up—either in addition to the Criteria Document or embedded in a modified version of this document—a clearer checklist of requirements both for review by the curriculum committee and for distribution to instructors who plan to submit new courses—and ultimately for students to clearly understand the purpose of a course from its syllabus. Students particularly demanded that syllabi do not only state that they fulfill certain General Education requirements, but how and why they do this.
- This checklist of requirements should be distributed to faculty on a regular basis (question no. 6). New faculty should get this **before** starting to teach either existing courses (which they may want to modify) or new courses. They could get the list from their department chairs or undergraduate directors upon signing the contract or official employment. (While orientation events and courses of the Center for Teaching and Learning could also serve to distribute the checklist, these commonly take place only at the beginning of the semester and thus too late to significantly modify syllabi). The checklist should be sent to the entire faculty at the end of each semester so that it could be taken into account when planning courses for the next semester. Department chairs (and undergraduate directors) should be encouraged to control that the criteria are maintained when instructors of existing courses change.
- Here are some examples of what should be stated more clearly in the criteria document, the checklist, and the syllabi:
  - Referring to question no. 1: While change over time seems to be addressed in all HS courses, this is not always clear as a central aspect from the syllabi. Thus, no specific history requirement is necessary, but all HS courses should make clear in content and syllabus that change over time is a major component of the course.
  - Referring to question no. 2: Most PH courses seem to contain significant content in ethics and moral reasoning. Some courses clearly discuss authors who have written about ethics and moral reasoning without making sufficiently clear in the syllabus, however, that an engagement with ethics and moral reasoning is really a major component of the course (and that these authors are not mainly treated from a historical or literary point of view).

- Referring to question no. 3: The distinction between LA and VP courses is sufficiently clear in the majority of courses, including specific film courses. Since some ambiguities still existed, also for one of the five film courses reviewed, syllabi of film courses should make explicitly clear whether films are primarily analyzed from a literary/historical/sociological (LA) or visual/aesthetic/artistic (VP) point of view. In addition, a list of criteria should be set up of what should be done in LA-film courses vs. VP-film courses (aims, contents, methods, theories, etc.).
- Referring to general requirements, notably the 10 pages writing requirement: Syllabi should clearly state not only that writing is required, but how many pages are required, whether they are graded, and what exactly is the format and purpose of this writing (research paper, essay, journal entry, lab report, etc.).
- Referring to general requirements, notably final exams: Syllabi should clearly state the nature and purpose of final exams.
- Arts and Crafts courses should fulfill the VP requirement (question no. 4).
- The balance of General Education courses (question no. 5)—within the section of approaches as well as between different sections (foundations, approaches, connections, etc.)—should be discussed on a higher level, as it fundamentally regards the composition of the entire new curriculum.
- While most of the 61 reviewed courses fulfill the specific rubric requirements regarding contents, methods, theories, etc., the following courses should be revised or taken from the list of General Education courses: ASIA 162, COMM 140, GEOG 120, LING 101, PHIL 101, PHIL 134, SOC 130, WMST 121.
- In the general review of all 61 courses, the 10 pages writing requirement or equivalent intellectual work emerged as the most problematic issue. The nature, purpose, and particularly length of assignments are often not sufficiently indicated in syllabi. Thus, for 14 courses (23%) this requirement cannot be assessed, and in 16 (26%) further cases it is currently not met. Therefore, this requirement needs clarification and critical revision, addressing, for example, the following issues: It should be made clearer what exactly are 10 pages (size/format of page; word count; font size of text and notes; line spacing; text only, or also footnotes, bibliography, illustrations; etc.); which formats are considered to be intellectual work (e.g., also blogs?); whether all pages must be corrected and graded; whether an essay/paper etc. fulfilling the 10 pages writing component can entirely substitute for the obligatory final exam (“take-home examination,” as practiced in some courses)—distinctions between take-home examination, midterm or final exam, midterm or final essay (counting towards the 10 pages) are not clear.

It is obvious that this requirement is problematic logistically in large courses with 150-400 students. The number of Teaching Assistants in large courses could almost never be determined from the Syllabi, but some committee members knew from their own experience and their colleagues that often only 2-4 Teaching Assistants are available. While the committee is in general strongly in favor of keeping the writing requirement for General Education courses, some changes seem necessary. For example, a ratio of Teaching Assistant to number of students (or pages to be graded: e.g., a minimum of 1 TA per 30-40 students/300-400 pages) could be introduced, and if this cannot be met by departments, they could be allowed to lower the writing requirement accordingly in these courses or to possibly even drop it altogether in exceptional cases. In addition, regular workshops and training possibilities for both faculty and TAs should be offered that would teach them how to set up General Education paper assignments and grade these papers more efficiently.

While the 10 pages writing requirement is a problem in large lecture courses that needs revision, the committee unanimously agreed that the solution cannot be to remove General Education requirements from these courses, because often these large courses offer the only possibility for students to fulfill the requirements at all.

## ATTACHMENT

### Detailed analysis of data

- Final exams are mostly taken in class; in only five cases a final exam or equivalent could not clearly be identified: AMST 246, ASIA/RELI 180, COMM 140, ENGL 142, GEOL 109.
- The 10 pages writing requirement or equivalent intellectual work is clearly the most problematic issue. The nature, purpose, and particularly length of assignments (papers, essays, responses, journal entries, etc.) are often not sufficiently indicated in syllabi. Thus, for 14 courses (23%) this requirement cannot be assessed, and in 16 (26%) further cases it is currently not met.

#### *1) Physical and Life Sciences with field experience/laboratory requirement (PL/PX)*

Six PL and six PX were reviewed, of which six are paired as lecture plus lab courses.<sup>1</sup> All courses focus on scientific content and scientific method (only questioned for GEOL 109 by 1 of 2 reviewers), and also devote a significant amount of time to the science's broader perspective. In the six PL courses, the 10 pages writing requirement<sup>2</sup> seems to have been largely met, although three courses require equivalent intellectual work whose purpose and amount is not always clearly identifiable (ASTR 101, BIOL 101, PHYS 100). In the six PX courses this requirement seems to be met by the field experience component and related work. All of the six PX courses include a significant field experience, only questioned by one of two reviewers for PHYS 104. 11 of 12 courses have an in-class final exam, only GEOL 109 requires neither a final exam nor an identifiable equivalent.

#### *2) Non-Historical Social and Behavioral Sciences (SS)*

11 courses were reviewed.<sup>3</sup> All courses focus on the scientific study of individual or collective behavior, which was only questioned by one of two reviewers for LING 101. Four of 11 courses do not clearly draw on established quantitative or qualitative methods of analysis and interpretation (certainly LING 101, SOC 130, WMST 121, possibly GEOG 120). Whether theoretical reflection on empirical findings is a part of the course cannot be assessed for three of 11 courses (GEOG 120, LING 101, SOC 130). The 10 pages requirement is not met in 7 of 11 courses (ECON 101, GEOG 120, LING 101, PLCY 101, POLI

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<sup>1</sup> PL: ASTR 101, BIOL 101, GEOL 109, MASC 101, PHYS 100, PSYC 101. PX: ASTR 101L, BIOC 107, BIOL 101L, BIOL 252, GEOL 101L, PHYS 104. Paired: ASTR 101/L, BIOL 101/L, GEOL 109 with 101L.

<sup>2</sup> 10 pages writing requirements stands here for both 10 pages of written work over the course of the semester and equivalent intellectual work.

<sup>3</sup> AFRI 265, ECON 101, GEOG 120, GEOG 259, LING 101, PLCY 101, POLI 130, PSCY 240, RELI 121, SOCI 130, WMST 101.

130, SOC 130, WMST 101). Final exams seem to be part of all courses, in two cases with take home components (AFRI 265, RELI 121).

Several courses of this rubric seem to be overall problematic and should be reviewed or taken from the list of SS courses: esp. LING 101 and SOC 130, possibly also GEOG 120 and WMST 121.

### 3) *Historical Analysis (HS)*

Nine courses were reviewed in order to answer the specific question of whether HS courses consistently address change over time, or of whether there should be a specific history requirement.<sup>4</sup> Change over time is addressed in all courses, although in several cases (AFAM 101, ANTH 151) it is not clear from the syllabus that this is really a central aspect of the course.

The systematic study of human behaviors in past times is central in all courses (only questioned for ANTH 145 by one of three reviewers). The 10 pages writing requirement<sup>5</sup> is not fulfilled in four of nine courses (ASIA/RELI 180, CLAR 120, HIST 128, RELI/JWST 106). While in one case as little as a group essay of 5 pages is required, in another writing which would amount to 10 pages in total is partially optional and not graded. Only one of nine courses (ASIA/RELI 180) has no a final exam in class and also no clearly identifiable equivalent.

### 4) *Philosophical and Moral Reasoning (PH)*

Ten courses<sup>6</sup> were reviewed in order to assess the specific question of whether they contain significant content in ethics or moral reasoning. This is not clearly the case in two of the 10 courses, PHIL 101 and PHIL 134. For SOCI 273 it was questioned whether it meets criteria for assessing ideas and understanding philosophical thinking. The 10 pages writing requirement is certainly not met in three courses (ANTH 146, PHIL 101, PHIL 230) and possibly not met in four more courses (PHIL 134, PHIL 150, PHIL 210, SOC 273), in total seven of 10 courses. Large lectures courses with 400 students such as ANTH 146 require only a maximum of four double-spaced pages. In many of the PHIL courses with far less than 100 students, the length of papers is simply not indicated. A final exam is always included.

### 5) *Literary Arts (LA)*

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<sup>4</sup> AFAM 101, ANTH 145, ANTH 151, ASIA/RELI 180, CLAR 120, HIST 120, HIST 140, HIST 151, RELI 106.

<sup>5</sup> 10 pages writing requirements stands here for both 10 pages of written work over the course of the semester and equivalent intellectual work.

<sup>6</sup> ANTH 156, GERM 245, PHIL 101, PHIL 134, PHIL 160, PHIL 165, PHIL 210, PHIL 230, POL 271, SOCI 273.

Eight LA<sup>7</sup> courses and 11 VP courses (see below) were reviewed in order to assess the specific question of whether the distinction between LA and VP is sufficiently clear, particularly for film courses that appear in both rubrics. The distinction is clear for all courses listed as LA courses. Two-thirds of the contents of all eight courses involve reading/analysis/creation of literary texts. The 10 pages writing requirement is not clearly met in ENGL 127 and ENGL 289. A final exam is included in all courses (except for FYS ENGL 57), in two cases with take home components (AMST 246, ENGL 289).

6) *Visual & Performing Arts (VP)*

11 VP courses<sup>8</sup>, among them four film courses (see above), were reviewed. Nine of 11 courses focus on analysis of or creative expression within, the visual or performing arts; this is not the case for ASIA 162 (a film course) and questioned by one of two reviewers for COMM 140. The 10 pages writing requirement is not met in ASIA 162 and DRAM 116, and could not be assessed for AFAM 259, ART 151, COMM 140, PORT 388. The existence and nature of the final exam is not clear for AMST 246, COMM 140, ENGL 142. ASIA 162 and COMM 140 seem to be overall problematic courses that should be reviewed or taken from the list of VP courses.

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<sup>7</sup> AMST 246, ARAB 150, ASIA 147, ASIA 151, ASIA 451, ENGL 057, ENGL 127, ENGL 289. Specific film course listed as LA: AMST 246.

<sup>8</sup> AFAM 259, AMST 483, ANTH 123, ART 151, ASIA 162, COMM 140, DRAM 116, ENGL 142, GERM 060, MUSC 145, PORT 388. Specific film courses listed as VP: ASIA 162, ENGL 142, GERM 060, PORT 388.