

February 25, 2005

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## MEMORANDUM

To: Academic Department Chair  
From: Herbert R. Chereck, University Registrar  
Subject: Descriptions for Group-Satisfying Courses

I write to request your help in communicating the content of our UO Group-satisfying courses more effectively. These courses play the key role of introducing students, regardless of major, to the three major disciplinary groups: Humanities/Arts and Letters, Social Science, and Natural Science. The advent of the online Class Schedule means that we are no longer restricted by the format and 25-word limit of present course descriptions in the University Catalog. We can now link the Class Schedule to fuller descriptions, composed by the faculty who actually teach the courses. It is routine for students to consult the Class Schedule when registering for courses, and both students and advisors use the search function to find classes in particular subject areas. Direct links from the Class Schedule to course descriptions that are truly informative will encourage thoughtful course selection.

To encourage students to see Group-satisfying courses for what they are—opportunities to indulge curiosity and discover new interests—the Undergraduate Council included expanded online course descriptions among its amendments to the criteria for these courses. These amendments were approved by the University Senate last spring (2004), with the goal of introducing improved course descriptions for the 05/06 academic year. The complete text of the motion may be found at [darkwing.uoregon.edu/~uosenate/dirsen034/US034-8.html](http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~uosenate/dirsen034/US034-8.html).

I am asking you and your faculty to develop expanded description(s) for the Group-satisfying courses within your discipline. A list of these courses is attached to this memo, and faculty are encouraged to take full advantage of this opportunity to present their courses engagingly. The amendment gives the following guidelines for creating effective course descriptions.

Expanded course descriptions should:

- State the fundamental question(s) addressed by the course, and indicate how the course meets the criteria for Group status. The second point is not meant to be a technical justification for Group status, but an indication of how the course fits into the particular disciplinary area to which it belongs (Humanities/Arts and Letter, Social Science, or Natural Science).
- Be substantially expanded over those provided in the University Catalog. Course information should be understandable to someone unfamiliar with the field and should emphasize the questions or issues that reveal, by their breadth and significance, why the course has earned Group-satisfying status. Electronic syllabi providing this information will suffice in the event an extended description is not yet available. Additional guidelines for constructing syllabi are available on the web at [registrar.uoregon.edu/facnstaff/syllabus.htm](http://registrar.uoregon.edu/facnstaff/syllabus.htm)

You may find it helpful to look at the attached sample course descriptions that the Undergraduate Council used to illustrate the intent of its amendment. These correspond to existing UO courses and show the contrast between Catalog copy and what is now possible. You might also want to take a look at Duke University's Course Synopsis Handbook, which students can access when choosing courses at <http://www.aas.duke.edu/reg/synopsis/view.cgi>. As you'll see, the system allows faculty great freedom in presenting their courses, but the uncomplicated format makes the information easy to find.

Please send your course descriptions, in electronic form (preferably in Microsoft Word) to **NOW: Mike Jefferis, Assistant to the Registrar** ([jefferis@uoregon.edu](mailto:jefferis@uoregon.edu), 6-1264). Our goal in the Registrar's office is to post these new course descriptions by May 16, 2005, when registration for fall 2005 begins. **To meet that deadline, we would like to receive your files by Friday, April 22.**

cc. Dean, Each College and School

## Examples of Expanded Course Descriptions

### Humanities/Arts and Letters

#### Humanities 102: Introduction to the Humanities II

**Catalog description:** Introduction to the Humanities. Ideas and modes of vision Western culture has inherited from the medieval to the Renaissance periods. Readings and discussions focus on literature, philosophy, history, the arts, and religion.

#### **Expanded course description:**

Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Middle Ages. Humanities integrates a number of academic disciplines—history, literature, philosophy, religion, art and architecture—in the study of the world's cultures. The middle term of this course treats the "Middle Ages," a period when religion played an especially important role almost everywhere. In Europe the period is often thought of as the "Christian Middle Ages," but from Spain all the way to India it was also a golden age of Islam. A prominent feature of the period is the tension among the three "Abrahamic" religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—think of the Crusades. These tensions are obviously still with us. Our news is dominated by the wars among these three religious groups—in Israel, in the whole of the middle East, and around the world. This course examines the deep history of these relations. If the assignments sometimes seem esoteric or "academic," as assignments often do, remember that they're in fact urgently relevant to our historical moment. Everyone should know Ibn Ishaq's Life of the Prophet, for example, even if 8th century Arabia seems distant.

### Social Science

#### History 191: China, Past and Present

**Catalog description:** Introduction to Chinese culture. Explores meanings of past and present in 20th-century efforts to modernize China. Chronological and topical inquiry into politics, literature, social structure, gender, art, economy.

**Expanded course description:** China today has multiple pasts—imperial, republican and revolutionary. China Past and Present introduces the epic sweep of China's historical transformations since the nineteenth century. This survey provides a basis for understanding the uneasy relationship between past and present in modern China. Since the late Qing dynasty, Chinese intellectuals, reformers and revolutionaries have attempted to modify, reject, even to eradicate aspects of the Chinese past in order to construct a new, modern present. At the same time, they have sought to preserve a sense of specifically Chinese identity, and to redefine modernity in Chinese terms. By the end of the course, students should be attuned to the ways China's pasts haunt its present, and to the way in which the changing politics of the present transform understandings of the past.

History 191 is a continuation of History 190, though 190 is not a prerequisite. 191 focuses on acquainting students with contemporary China in historical perspective. Most of the class is devoted to a chronological and thematic overview of China's modern transformations. This overview serves as a foundation for a historical understanding of contemporary issues in Chinese politics and society which we will explore at the end of the class.

## Natural Science

### Physics 161: Physics of Energy and Environment

**Catalog description:** Practical study of energy generation and environmental impact, including energy fundamentals, fossil fuel use, global warming, nuclear energy, and energy conservation.

**Expanded course description:** A practical course for non-science majors to introduce the concepts necessary to understand and work with energy (what it is), energy generation (transformation) and energy use. We will be mostly interested in the relationship of energy to our everyday lives (other than eating), the environmental consequences of global energy consumption, and what this means for the future of our lifestyles. There is no question that major changes in our energy consumption habits will be forced upon us in our lifetimes. We will explore why this will happen and what some of the alternatives might be.

Fundamental issues of physics will be discussed with a minimum of mathematics (high school algebra at most). Some calculations will be required for homework and a few of the exam problems, so a standard calculator will be essential (scientific calculator not required but helpful).

Of the ten week term, approximately 5 weeks will be spent introducing and developing a reasonably thorough understanding of energy: mechanics (physics of motion), electricity and magnetism (most versatile form of energy) and thermodynamics (movement of heat). We will learn about mechanical power based on engines (heat, combustion, electrical or solar energy).

The last part of the term will deal with our energy lifestyles. We will study the source of and use of fossil fuels, generation of electricity and nuclear energy. Finally, the environmental consequences (air pollution, global warming) of our energy use will be discussed.

The sun is the ultimate energy source for world weather, and, as it turns out, for most of our present needs as well. These topics will be discussed in enough detail that we can apply the concepts to everyday life. Great emphasis will be placed on practical examples and in-class demonstrations. We will have 2-3 "in-class" lab days to do practical experiments. For example, we will perform very simple experiments to measure the power output of the human body and energy content of fossil fuels.