

# Motion US03/04-8 -- Amend the Criteria for Group-Satisfying Courses

Sponsored by: Undergraduate Council  
For senate action: May 12, 2004

The Undergraduate Council moves to amend the existing criteria for status as a Group-satisfying course by adding the following guidelines: #1-3 to apply to all Group-satisfying courses, and guideline #4 to apply to 300-level, Group-satisfying courses, in particular.

Together with existing legislation, these guidelines are intended to be used in the review of new courses by existing curriculum committees, as well as to guide cyclical reviews of existing courses (as called for by US99/00-2). Departmental responsibilities as specified in numbers one and three will be monitored by the Registrar's office.

- 1. For all Group-satisfying courses to be offered during a particular term, faculty or departments are asked to post electronically, in the Schedule of Classes, course descriptions that are substantially expanded over those provided in the catalog. The posted 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 status. Examples of such descriptions are included in the Addendum to the Motion. To help students make informed choices of courses, the web postings should be made prior to the start of the registration period for the term in question, and should be directly accessible from the Schedule of Classes. Links to the Schedule of Classes are easily established, and departments may choose to give this responsibility to office staff or to individual faculty, as is locally appropriate. In cases where course descriptions are not yet available, electronic syllabi that provide this information will suffice.
- 2. The syllabus for each Group-satisfying course should state the fundamental question(s) addressed by the course, and indicate how the course meets the criteria for Group status. The instructor may accomplish this either by including the course description posted on the web or by creating another one.
- 3. All Group-satisfying courses should be offered in time periods that are standard for regular academic terms, and in no case may be offered for a period shorter than three weeks.
- 4. 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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## **Financial Impact of the Motion**

The part of the motion that has the potential for financial impact is the requirement that Group-satisfying courses be at least three weeks in length, since there are a few courses currently offered that do not meet this minimum. These courses are offered either in Summer Session or as part of the September Experience Program that occupies a period of 9 days after the formal Summer Session has ended. The upper limit of the motion's financial impact is \$93,300, but the actual impact could be considerably smaller since the affected courses could be offered in a different format and students might enroll in other courses if these were withdrawn. The impact would be further offset, perhaps substantially, as students substitute other courses to satisfy the Group requirement. In addition, to put the maximum loss of revenue in perspective, it is important to appreciate that \$93,300 represents only about 3.7% of total Summer Session/ September Experience net revenue.

For 2004 courses, the estimate breaks down as follows:

Summer Session 2004: There are four scheduled Group-satisfying courses that do not meet the requirement. Net revenue for these (projected enrollments minus faculty salaries) is estimated at \$53,300.

September Experience 2004: There are eight Group-satisfying courses scheduled for the nine-day period corresponding to September Experience. Net revenue for these (projected enrollments minus faculty salaries) is estimated at \$40,000.

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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 "d," the Council proposes fuller descriptions of the desired characteristics of Group-satisfying courses at the 300 level.

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## **Addendum to the Motion**

### **1. Examples of expanded course descriptions**

Guideline #1 asks faculty or departments to post course descriptions that are substantially expanded over those provided in the catalog. Below are examples of expanded course descriptions taken from current UO syllabi, along with the contrasting catalog copy for the same courses.

## Physics 161: Physics of Energy and the 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 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.

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.

## **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 Ð 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.

### **Humanities 102: Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Middle Ages**

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: Humanities integrates a number of academic disciplines Ð history, literature, philosophy, religion, art and architecture Ð in the study of the world's cultures. The middle term of the 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 Ð think of the Crusades. These tensions are obviously still with us. Our news is dominated by the wars among these three religious groups Ð 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.

2. 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.

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

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