

Memo to: Ken Cukrowski, Chair

From: Steve Wages

Re: Proposed Criteria for General Education Requirements in Social Sciences

**Core Social Science courses should meet the following criteria:**

**1. General Definition and Requirements**

A course in the social sciences should satisfy the following general definition and requirements.

- Social Science is a branch of science that deals with the institutions and functioning of human society and with the interpersonal relationships of individuals as members of society.
- The term social sciences is used to distinguish those fields that use the scientific method to study human behavior and society from the natural sciences, which use the scientific method to study nature and from the formal sciences, such as mathematics and logic, which use a different (*a priori*) methodology. The social sciences are also different from the humanities which study the human condition using methods that are primarily analytical, critical, or speculative, as distinguished from mainly empirical approaches.
- A general education course in the social sciences should contribute to Student Learning Outcome #2 as stated in the ACU catalog which requires students to demonstrate a deep understanding of and hands-on-experience with the inquiry practices of disciplines that explore the natural, socio-cultural, aesthetic, and religious realms.
- A general education course in the social sciences does not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession.

**2. Knowledge Base**

A course in the social sciences will focus on human functioning including the basic assumptions about humans, their behaviors, and the dynamics of human interaction; the relationships between humans and their physical environment; the creation and interaction with institutions of power and governance, and/or the study of how people produce, distribute and consume goods and services. A course in the social sciences should involve the study of human functioning at the level of the individual, small group, institution, organization, community, or larger population.

- a. At the individual level, this course may involve the study of behavioral factors such as cognition, memory, language, perception, personality, emotion, motivation, and others; or
- b. At higher levels of aggregation, this course may involve the study of social variables such as the structure and dynamics of small groups (e.g., couples, families, work groups, etc.); institutions and organizations (e.g., schools, religious organizations, etc.); communities (defined by geography or common interests); and larger demographic, political, economic, and cultural systems; or
- c. This course may involve the study of the interactions within and between these levels of aggregation, such as the influence of sociocultural factors on cognitive processes and emotional responses or the reciprocal influence between small groups and larger communities; or
- d. The course may focus on the interpretation of past practices or the history of human functioning over time.

### 3. The Scientific Method

A course in the social sciences should introduce students to the scientific method as employed within the discipline to study human behavior and society. These might include:

- a. How the field employs a variety of methodological approaches including surveys and questionnaires, interviews, randomized clinical trials, direct observation, descriptive methods, laboratory and field experiments, standardized tests, statistical modeling, document analysis, ethnography, and evaluation; or
- b. An emphasis on theory-driven research, hypothesis development, the search for general principles of behavioral and social functioning; and the importance ascribed to a developmental, lifespan perspective; or
- c. An emphasis on individual variation, and variation across socio-demographic categories such as gender, age, and sociocultural status; and a focus on the social and biological contexts of behavior; or
- d. How theory-driven research or the interpretation of previous practice are applied within the discipline to address contemporary issues including social, historical, political, economic and/or moral issues.

### 4. Course Content

Courses that satisfy the General Education requirements in Social Sciences should either:

- a. Introduce students to a particular discipline within the social sciences, with an emphasis on mastering its basic methodologies, terminology, key concepts, major research findings, and influential theories or
- b. Introduce students to a particular period of history with an emphasis on event timelines, historical biographies, and the critical debates associated with their interpretation.

### 5. Recognized Social Science Disciplines

The “Liberal Arts Core Curriculum at ACU: Building a 21st Century Education—Final Report to the ACU Faculty by the General Education Review Steering Committee” as approved by the ACU faculty provides guidance with respect to recognized social science disciplines. Though not intended to be a listing of all social science disciplines, the document recognized Anthropology, Economics, Family Studies, Geography, History, Political Science, Psychology, or Sociology as social sciences.

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