



## St. Olaf College General Education Curriculum Studies in Human Behavior and Society (HBS) Requirement

### Description:

Two courses introducing concepts, theories, and methods for the empirical understanding of human behavior, social relations, social institutions and social issues. The two courses taken by a student may not be in the same discipline or interdisciplinary program.

### Intended learning outcomes:

*Students will demonstrate:*

1. an understanding of individual or social human behavior from the perspective of one or more disciplines.
2. knowledge of empirical methods for studying human behavior.
3. the ability to use theories and concepts of human behavior with appropriate empirical evidence to analyze contemporary social issues.

### Course guidelines with Curriculum Committee comments:

1. Courses introduce students to the disciplined analysis of one or more of the following: human behavior; social relations; and social institutions.

*Comment:* Courses in Human Behavior and Society examine how and why people come to be human or to act as human beings, and how they organize and interact. Some courses may focus on individual human behavior, while other courses may focus on patterns of aggregate behavior in social relations or social institutions.

For courses with a social emphasis, human behavior can be understood as patterns of choices made in response to social and institutional systems. Such courses should illuminate the ways that people make choices in the face of social sanctions, institutional incentives and disincentives, etc. They can also examine the ways in which individual choices shape social institutions.

Institutions organize social behavior to fulfill human needs in an orderly way. Most societies have an institution for reproduction (the family), for transmitting social knowledge (education), for attending to ultimate questions (religion), for feeding and clothing members (the economy, including formal and informal markets), and for managing conflict (government). But primary and informal group behavior - dyads, friendships, small groups, voluntary organizations, etc. - may also order human behavior, and could also be the focus for courses in Human Behavior and Society.

2. Courses introduce students to prevailing theories of individual and social behavior, and to methods for analyzing and interpreting empirical evidence. That evidence may be either quantitative or qualitative.

*Comment:* Courses in Human Behavior and Society also introduce the systematic analysis of empirical evidence as a distinctive way of knowing. Empirical evidence is derived from the deliberate observation of human experience, complementing other modes of inquiry, such as intuition, normative analysis, or purely abstract reasoning. The systematic gathering and analysis of empirical evidence is based on reasoned choices about what and how to observe.

Courses may analyze and interpret a variety of empirical evidence. Some of the evidence may be primarily quantitative, consisting of statistics which summarize patterns in aggregate behavior; some may be primarily qualitative, consisting of the systematic rendering and interpretation of people's words and/or systematic accounts of their behavior in their ordinary surroundings; and some may be both. Empirical evidence may be gathered through polls and surveys; various kinds of experimental research; open-ended interviewing; participant observation; content analysis; discourse analysis; and carefully-crafted case studies. Such evidence may be used to describe, explain, and/or predict individual or aggregate human behavior, and to help evaluate the usefulness of relevant and important theory.

While explicit attention to theories, concepts, and methods of empirical analysis are an essential part of a general education course in Human Behavior and Society, that attention should not be the exclusive focus of the course. Advanced courses in research methods are more suitable for disciplinary or interdisciplinary major requirements than for general education. The primary purpose of this part of the requirement is to provide students with the skills they need for the critical assessment of empirical evidence, not to train them to do advanced empirical research themselves.

3. Courses engage students in the systematic examination of social issues, past, present, or both.

*Comment:* Courses must provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge of human behavior, social relations, and/or social institutions, and their skills in the critical assessment of empirical evidence, to the examination of social issues. While many of these issues will have current significance, some may be more characteristic of past societies.

4. Courses that incorporate both normative and empirical analysis must give equal or greater attention to the latter.

*Comment:* While empirical inquiry is distinct from other ways of knowing, such as normative, aesthetic, or interpretive, each mode of inquiry speaks profoundly to the concerns of the others. Thus, courses that meet this requirement may also introduce non-empirical ways of thinking systematically about human behavior and society. Indeed, the inclusion of more than one way of knowing may enrich considerably the content of a course in this area.

#### **Information for instructors proposing HBS credit for a specific course:**

The St. Olaf Curriculum Committee is responsible for reviewing and approving proposals to designate individual courses as meeting the Human Behavior and Society requirement. Instructors may seek HBS credit as part of a proposal for a new course, or may seek to add HBS credit to an existing course. HBS credit is attached to the *course*, not to the instructor or to the specific term in which the course is offered. A proposal for HBS credit must show how the course meets each of the HBS course guidelines; the comments following a guideline provide additional information about how the Curriculum Committee interprets and applies that guideline in reviewing proposals. Instructors are encouraged to consider the comments as well as the guidelines themselves in preparing proposals. Forms and additional instructions for submitting proposals electronically are available on the website of the [Office of the Registrar](#).

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