



St. Olaf College General Education Curriculum Historical Studies in Western Culture (HWC) Requirement

Description:

Two courses dealing with the Western cultural heritage, intended to develop historical perspective on, and critical appreciation of, its major traditions, institutions, and achievements.

Intended learning outcomes:

Students will demonstrate:

1. an understanding of important texts and contexts in the social, political, economic, cultural, artistic, or intellectual heritage of the West.
2. the ability to analyze historical evidence and to understand history as “constructed accounts” of the past.
3. an understanding of the distinctive perspectives of people who lived in the time period or settings studied.
4. an understanding of alternative interpretations of achievements and failures in Western culture and how these interpretations have changed over time.

Course guidelines with Curriculum Committee comments:

1. The focus of these courses is the history of the cultural heritage of Europe, whether in its countries of origin or influence.

Comment: In drawing up this guideline, the Curriculum Committee has in mind, first, the word "Western" in the title and description, and second, the cultures designated for study under Multicultural Studies (Asian, African, Latin American, Middle Eastern, and Russian). The committee wishes to maintain a distinction between what is studied under each of the requirements. However, it would be quite possible for a course concerning some aspect of the cultural heritage of Russia, or of a country in Latin America, to qualify under historical Studies in Western Culture provided the focus was upon what was European or of European origin.

2. Cultural heritage includes the institutional, intellectual, and creative manifestations of human activity and expression.

Comment: "Cultural heritage" is a broad term, embracing a wide range of subjects and phenomena. The institutional heritage includes the political, economic, social, religious and artistic. The intellectual heritage includes theology, philosophy, science, and political and economic theory. Art, literature, music, dance, theater, film, and television fall within the artistic heritage. Subjects from any of these fields would be suitable for study under this requirement, provided they offered an historically based course.

3. To develop historical perspective, courses must relate their subjects to the broader historical and cultural contexts in which they occurred, and they must help students attain a sense of relationship with the past and an awareness of the viewpoint from which they approach it.

Comment: Courses that focus upon some particular aspect of the Western cultural heritage, whether institutional, intellectual or artistic, must study that aspect against the background of its broader cultural and historical setting, and give attention to the perspectives of the people of the time and place being studied.

To help students attain a sense of relationship with the past is to help them recognize both a connection with it and a detachment from it, to recognize that they are part of a continuously unfolding story but situated at a different point in its ongoing development from the period being studied.

4. Courses will develop critical appreciation through the enquiring analysis of historical evidence and cultural phenomena, and by stressing the complex causes that lie behind the development of the cultural heritage.

Comment: The enquiring analysis of historical evidence introduces students to questions such as, "What constitutes historical evidence?" "What choices must be made in the selection of evidence?" and "How is historical evidence used to construct an account of the past?" Courses should develop an understanding of "history" as an interpretative reconstruction of the past. They should alert students to the intellectual premises and procedures underlying such a reconstruction.

Critical appreciation means the ability to carry out an informed analysis of the particular subject of the course in relation to its historical context, and to arrive at an appreciation of the multiple influences that have shaped the development of the Western cultural heritage. In addition, critical appreciation of the Western cultural heritage implies that courses will attempt to evaluate that heritage in terms of its merits and weaknesses. It might address such questions as: Why does Western culture give prominence to some achievements over others? Is Western culture a stable body of achievement, or does it undergo periodic reassessment and redefinition?

5. Courses must cover a period of sufficient length to illustrate the origins or development of their subject over time.

Comment: Courses should be of sufficient breadth and importance of topic to distinguish them from narrower, more specialized courses designed for majors in the field. Typically the principal subject matter of such courses will span a period of at least a century.

6. Major traditions, institutions, and achievements are those whose impact and influence have been far-reaching and long-lasting.

Comment: The Curriculum Committee is ready to be persuaded by faculty that the subject of a proposed course is something "whose impact and influence have been far-reaching and long-lasting."

Information for instructors proposing HWC credit for a specific course:

The St. Olaf Curriculum Committee is responsible for reviewing and approving proposals to designate individual courses as meeting the Historical Studies in Western Culture requirement. Instructors may seek HWC credit as part of a proposal for a new course, or may seek to add HWC credit to an existing course. HWC credit is attached to the *course*, not to the instructor or to the specific term in which the course is offered. A proposal for HWC credit must show how the course meets each of the HWC 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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