

Ethnic Studies Courses

Excerpted from Faculty Document 1736: Undergraduate Ethnic Studies General Education Requirement:

"The University of Wisconsin-Madison is committed to fostering an understanding and appreciation of diversity, in the belief that doing so will:

- Better prepare students for life and careers in an increasingly multicultural U.S. environment,
- Add breadth and depth to the University curriculum, and
- Improve the campus climate.

One of the University's overarching goals is to infuse the curriculum in all disciplines with diversity, including those where traditionally it has been absent. The Ethnic Studies Requirement (ESR) is one of several key elements in reaching this goal. This is a requirement that all students take a 3-credit course that considers ethnic/racial minorities that have been marginalized or discriminated against in the U.S. Because issues of ethnic diversity and religion are often intertwined and cannot easily be separated, courses that focus only on religion may, where appropriate, fulfill the ESR.

All courses that the implementation committee approves as satisfying the requirement must provide evidence that the course material illuminates the circumstances, conditions, and experiences of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States."

Descriptive Guidelines for Ethnic Studies Courses

The Ethnic Studies Implementation Committee developed a series of descriptive guidelines to facilitate implementation of the Ethnic Studies Requirement.

- ESR courses must be offered for a minimum of 3 credits.
- Evidence (e.g., syllabus, reading list) must be provided demonstrating that the course material illuminates the circumstances, conditions, and experiences of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States.
- Courses that explore the circumstances, conditions, and experiences of racial and ethnic minorities in a comparative international format must devote at least 25% of the course (lecture, discussion, reading materials, etc.) to the experience and/or theoretical understanding of the means by which persistently marginalized groups in the US negotiate the conditions of exclusion or marginalization.
- Courses that explore the condition of U.S. ethnic groups that were at one time marginalized but which have since been widely assimilated into the dominant U.S. culture must devote at least 25% of the course to the experience and/or theoretical understanding of the means by which persistently marginalized groups in the US negotiate the conditions of exclusion or marginalization.
- In cases where religion is intertwined with respect to ethnic/racial minorities that are persistently marginalized or discriminated against in the U.S., courses that focus on religion may fulfill the ESR.

(These guidelines were approved by University Academic Planning Council action, as reported in the Provost's 6-10-2005 memo accepting the final report of the Ethnic Studies Implementation Committee.)

For information on how to get a new ESR course approved, or to add ESR to an existing course, submit a "New Course" or "Course Change" proposal to the online course proposal system <https://courseproposals.wisc.edu/proposals/> Select the "General Education Designations"; indicate "YES" for GER review; and choose "Ethnic Studies".

Essential Learning in Ethnic Studies*

In March, 2010, UW-Madison's Ethnic Studies Subcommittee invited faculty and academic staff who teach or influence the most frequently taken ESR courses to meet and talk about student learning in the requirement. A key objective of the event was to articulate the goals ethnic studies courses share across campus, despite the breadth of topics these courses cover.

Beginning with the fundamental assumption that mastery of the content is the primary goal of any course, the group identified four learning goals that transcend specific content areas and instead speak to common objectives among ESR courses offered in a wide variety of topics. Instructors understand that the balance of attention paid to these learning goals will vary across the range of Ethnic Studies Courses we offer; however, every course is expected to emphasize at least one of these goals, and many will attend to all.

Awareness of History's Impact on the Present - Ethnic Studies courses highlight how certain histories have been valued and devalued, and how these differences have promulgated disparities in contemporary American society.

Ability to Recognize and Question Assumptions – Ethnic Studies courses promote recognition and application of critical thinking skills, specifically with respect to teaching students to harbor a healthy skepticism towards knowledge claims, whether in the form of media, political, or popular representations, primarily as these relate to race and ethnicity. As part of this process, the ESR should challenge students to question their own assumptions and preconceived notions on these topics.

A Consciousness of Self and Other - Awareness of self is inextricably linked with awareness of and empathy towards the perspectives of others. In constructing a space for this kind of discussion in their classrooms, Ethnic Studies courses give students an opportunity to think about identity issues, including their own identity, as well as the connections they might have to people “outside” their focused social circle.

Effective Participation in a Multicultural Society – Ethnic Studies courses should be relevant to students' “lives outside the classroom”, and pursuing the objectives above should not only lead to student behavioral change, but to *action* in the real world. The ESR should ultimately engender in students the ability to participate in a multicultural society more effectively, respectfully, and meaningfully. This participation may be as mundane as being able to discuss race with a colleague or friend, or to recognize inequities in interpersonal, institutional, or other contexts.

Participants also stressed that the ESR, in keeping with UW-Madison's tradition of exposing students to a diverse array of subject matter, helps to educate students about the presence and legitimacy of academic disciplines (e.g. those related to minority arts and literature) that they may otherwise not have encountered.

* Adapted from R. Benbow, “Discussion of Essential Learning in Ethnic Studies Requirement Courses, March 11, 2010” (16 June 2010).