

Report of the Social Science Core Curriculum Subcommittee

During the summer of 2010, Associate Dean Lowell Gustafson convened a committee consisting of the Chairs and Directors of social science and social-science-related departments and programs. This committee developed a rationale for the social science core requirement and a set of criteria that courses must meet in order to satisfy the core social science requirement.

The Social Science Core Curriculum Subcommittee formed during the fall of 2010. Its primary goal was to determine which courses would satisfy the social science course requirement. The Chairs and Directors of relevant programs were asked to submit requests for which courses should satisfy the core social science requirement. The Subcommittee met on October 25 and on November 3, 2010, in order to consider these requests. Where appropriate, additional information was sought from the departments or programs before a final decision was made about a course.

The remainder of this report has three major sections:

1. A statement of the rationale for the social science core requirement
2. A statement of the criteria that must be met by social science core courses
3. A list of courses that were considered as possible social science core courses along with an indication of whether the courses were approved or declined. In the latter case, a brief explanation is included. This section is organized by department and program.

Rationale for the Social Science Core Requirement

The Social Sciences are an integral part of the mission of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Villanova University, which includes providing “an atmosphere of responsible learning to a varied group of students who will be called to intellectual, moral, and professional leadership. To fulfill these goals, the College seeks to promote intellectual curiosity and rigor within the University; to instill the fundamentals of critical insight, mature judgment, and independent thinking in its students; and to awaken in its students a sense of the importance of values and the moral responsibility of caring for others and working for the betterment of society.”

In the Social Sciences, which stand at the intersection of science and the humanities, students and faculty grapple with the enduring questions and problems facing human society. The core requirement social science courses are designed to provide students with the analytical and evaluative tools to understand community and the challenges of being social, to understand the factors and processes affecting human behavior, to confront and solve social problems, and to appreciate the implications of human interaction, action and inaction.

Academic disciplines within the social sciences pursue the understanding of human behavior and society. They encompass topics ranging across epistemology, theory, empirical investigation, and practice, and depend upon multiple methods of inquiry, discovery, and critique.

Core social science courses provide students with the tools for analyzing human actions, enabling them to understand and apply a scientific approach in the study of individual and social issues, problems, and their own lives. As part of the University Core, social science courses foster critical understanding of human action and interaction with other humans and their environment. As in all areas of the core curriculum, these courses emphasize continued development of critical thinking skills, and quantitative or qualitative research skills using methods, theory, or applications relevant to the particular social science discipline.

Core social science courses help give students the skills to communicate effectively ideas and insights, generalize or infer principles about the world, and apply these inferences appropriately. They give students the opportunity to recognize and appreciate diverse perspectives on complex situations, and they may employ interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the causes of the challenges they face and the consequences of their actions. They teach students to evaluate sources of evidence, to establish causal relations or to determine other types of relations between facts. They equip students with the ability to evaluate conflicting points of view and conflicting evidence, and to learn to make judgments based on their analysis.

Criteria for Social Science Core Courses

A Social Science Core core course should meet one or more of the following criteria in order to be approved as a core social science course:

1. It may provide students with an understanding of human behavior and society from a scientific perspective, enabling them to appreciate the relevance of science to their own lives and to contemporary social issues and problems.
2. It may examine the social, psychological, political, economic, geo-spatial, and technological environment to identify ideas and trends and imagine possible outcomes.
3. It may help students develop a broad knowledge and awareness of human culture through the scientific study of cultural elements in different cultural contexts.
4. It may introduce students to the methodologies or forms of analysis that are used to expand knowledge in the social science discipline being studied. Students may gain an understanding of how such methodologies are integrally related to the nature of the questions being asked and the answers being sought.
5. It may examine the principles of behavior and social relations within and between species, including the implications for understanding human behavior and society.