

## Definitions

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**(1) Western Heritage:** The analysis of the historical processes which have given rise to the ideas, arts, and institutions defining Western society through the ages. Among scholarly interpreters of the West, it has been widely understood that Western civilization was formed from three distinct traditions: (a) the classical culture of Greece and Rome; (b) the Christian religion, particularly Western Christianity; and (c) the Enlightenment of the modern era.

**(2) The Modern Western World:** The critical study of current perspectives, products, and practices of modern societies in the Western world, which have evolved out of the traditions mentioned in (1) above.

## Rationale

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Our culture shapes our assumptions, defines our options, and governs the very categories in which we judge and perceive. It is so encompassing that we scarcely notice it. The great majority of courses and majors offered by a modern university consist of strands in the Western cultural fabric. The natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities are all deeply rooted in Western civilization; the university is itself a Western invention. In order to understand, appreciate and critically evaluate any aspect of this culture, one must have an understanding of both the context from which it arose and the place it occupies in modern society. By studying the Western heritage in the past and in the present, students will be encouraged to see the historical dimensions of the issues they face as engaged citizens today.

## Criteria for Approving Proposals

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### Learning objectives

- Learn about Western cultures, civilizations, traditions and worldviews.
- Critically study historical, social, political, economic, religious, philosophical, literary, artistic or scientific dimensions of Western cultural heritage.
- Develop an understanding of the range and variety of human experience within Western cultural heritage.
- Study the ways in which global and international structures and processes shape Western life.

Courses taught in fulfillment of the Western requirement will address as their primary topic one or more of the following:

- A country or geographic region, whose primary cultural heritage is from the prevailing cultures of Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.
- Displaced, migrant, or transnational populations whose primary cultural heritage is substantially European, as long as the focus is on their cultural resiliency and on maintaining ties to their Western countries of origin.
- Include historical, social, political, economic, religious, philosophical, linguistic, literary, artistic or scientific dimensions of Western cultural heritage or modern Western cultures.

## **Source Information on Similar Requirements at other Good Schools**

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Columbia University  
University of Chicago  
Stanford University  
St. John's College Maryland  
Randolph-Macon College  
St. Olaf  
Gonzaga University  
Providence College

## **Teaching Resources**

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Kramer, L. S., Reid, D., Barney, W. L., Eds. *Learning history in America: Schools, Cultures, and Politics*. (see [http://books.google.com/books?id=rLb6T3ZJpjc&pg=PA44&lpg=PA44&dq=Teaching+Western+culture&source=web&ots=s2QvRPPwjY&sig=IwDRAKPSSgKoOMTtquqgjeTzT1I&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=9&ct=result#PPP1,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=rLb6T3ZJpjc&pg=PA44&lpg=PA44&dq=Teaching+Western+culture&source=web&ots=s2QvRPPwjY&sig=IwDRAKPSSgKoOMTtquqgjeTzT1I&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=9&ct=result#PPP1,M1))

## **Assessment Resources**

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[www.esf.edu/facgov/assessment\\_PDFs/westerncivilization.pdf](http://www.esf.edu/facgov/assessment_PDFs/westerncivilization.pdf)

We struggled to find a consistent assessment instrument, which we attribute to the wide array of methods for approaching this core requirement at other colleges. As we refine our learning outcomes in this area the assessment instruments will easily follow.

## **Examples of Classes**

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Current courses in the “Western Tradition” area of the Simpson curriculum along with numerous possibilities for interdisciplinary study based on aforementioned course criteria.

## **Staffing and Costs**

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No additional faculty or staff would be needed to implement this requirement.

## **Implementation Challenges**

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The rise of multiculturalism renders contentious the prioritizing or focusing on only one cultural heritage.

Dichotomizing “Western” and “non-Western” may not be the most effective way to help students advance in their global awareness. (Should we consider perhaps “Global Awareness: Historical” and “Global Awareness: Contemporary” in which the complex interplay between Western and non-Western could be addressed?)

The designation “Western” sounds monolithic, but those societies that we group in this way are actually very diverse. How do we communicate that diversity to students, such that we do not reinforce their natural tendencies toward egocentrism and stereotyping?