

**THE UNIVERSITY CORE**  
**Rationale Statements for Each Requirement**  
28 April 2004

**DOCTRINAL FOUNDATION AND RELIGION ELECTIVES**

**Rationale:**

Religion courses are provided so that students may progress in their religious understanding and convictions simultaneously with their education progress in secular fields. As such religion courses are not meant to be only a devotional supplement but an integral part of the university curriculum that parallels university standards and expectations. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has always maintained that education is not complete without proper integration of secular and religious knowledge and values. All students at BYU should include regular gospel study as part of their university experience.

The heart of the religion component within the university core is the Doctrinal Foundation based upon careful, informed, and reflective study of sacred scripture and doctrines of the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—two courses in Book of Mormon, one in New Testament, and one in Doctrine and Covenants. In addition to the Doctrinal Foundation requirement, students must complete an additional six elective hours in religion. Together these requirements help students toward an ever deeper understanding of “the doctrines, the covenants, the ordinances, the standard works, and the history of the restored gospel” (Aims, “Intellectually Enlarging”).

**THE INDIVIDUAL IN SOCIETY**

**WELLNESS**

**Rationale:**

The Mission Statement of Brigham Young University states, “All instruction, programs and services . . . should make their own contribution toward the balanced development of the total person.” As such, a broad general education program would not be complete without instruction on how to truly care for the human body, mind and spirit as a literal temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Apostle Stephen L. Richards said, “The human body is sacred, the veritable tabernacle of the divine spirit which inhabits it. It is a solemn duty of mankind to develop, protect and preserve it from pollution, unnecessary wastage and weakness . . .” (*Where Is Wisdom?* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955] 208).

The wellness requirement is designed to: 1) provide instruction based on revealed truth, current scientific understanding and practical information about what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, and 2) offer practical experiences in fitness, wellness, skill acquisition and wholesome family recreation activities that motivate individuals to pursue healthy lifestyles for them and their family members throughout their lifetimes.

## **CITIZENSHIP**

### **AMERICAN HERITAGE**

#### **Rationale:**

The compelling idea of the American Heritage requirement is to help students understand and appreciate the American founding, the United States Constitution, and the American system of government and institutions in the context of the Restored Gospel.

In 1977, Martin Hickman, Dean of the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, recommended to the Board of Trustees that there be significant changes in the History 170 course that had been required at BYU for many years. In response to his proposal, the Board reported:

At our BYU Board of Trustees meeting on October 13, 1977, President Dallin H. Oaks gave the Board a report on the revision you and your colleagues have made in the American Heritage course material, a course that the Board has required of all BYU graduates. We were very pleased with your determination to give our students a superior course in the American heritage, including an account of the principles upon which our divinely inspired Constitution is based and the essentials of history, government and economics that need to be understood by all Latter-day Saints, and, indeed, by all Americans.

We are particularly pleased with the effort to incorporate in this course the insights of the restored gospel and the teaching of the living prophets, thus helping to inspire and inform our students with this union of sacred and secular truth we so earnestly seek at the University. While we realize that experience will allow further improvements in this course, we commend you and your colleagues for a fine effort well begun. Please share this commendation with those who have had part in this vital endeavor. [Signed by President Spencer W. Kimball, Nathan Eldon Tanner, and Marion G. Romney]

This letter, from the First Presidency and Board of Trustees, sets forth the principles and expectations upon which courses satisfying the American Heritage requirement must be based. In the past this requirement has been met primarily by the American Heritage 100 course, more recently supplemented by a combination of courses from History, Political Science, and Economics. One of the fundamental questions raised in American Heritage is, "How do we create a society that resolves, harmonizes, and coordinates conflicting interests while preserving freedom?" The founding documents are weighed in the balance of reasonable expectations of public virtue on the one hand and prudent regard for the self-interest and possible corruption of human action on the other. Many of the principles are political in nature, while others involve principles and institutions of economics. In addition, all the American institutions have a historical context that needs to be understood. An examination of some of the historical challenges to the nation and its institutions should equip students with the ability to compare and contrast the Founders' constitutionalism with more recent concerns of democracy and rights. The unending process of challenge and accommodation is an important part of American

Heritage.

## **GLOBAL AND CULTURAL AWARENESS**

### **Rationale:**

The university's Mission Statement affirms that students at BYU should understand "important ideas in their own cultural tradition as well as that of others," and concludes with the hope that BYU will play a role in improving the world. The Global and Cultural Awareness requirement proceeds from the assumption that we cannot improve that which we do not understand. In other words, since one of the Aims of a BYU Education is to enlarge the intellect through exposure to "the broad areas of human knowledge," awareness of others, in particular traditions and cultures outside one's own, is an important and necessary part of a student's education. The Global and Cultural Awareness component is founded upon the Lord's injunction for us to "become acquainted with . . . languages, tongues, and people" (D&C 90:15) and to understand "things which are abroad . . . and the perplexities of the nations" and to gain "knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms" (D& C 88:79).

Among the Aims of a BYU Education is an "informed awareness of the peoples, cultures, languages, and nations of the world." While the American Heritage requirement is specifically focused on American culture, and the Civilization sequence leads to increased awareness of the Western cultural tradition especially, the Global and Cultural Awareness requirement enhances that awareness with a greater understanding and appreciation of the varieties of human experience across time and space. Inherent in the notion of global and cultural awareness is the perspective that we are all spiritual offspring of the same God, that in addition to our common humanity we also possess a nascent divinity. The Global and Cultural Awareness requirement seeks to help BYU students come not only to see the relativity of many of their own, culturally-derived notions but also to "go forth to serve," having had meaningful discussion about or hands-on experience in dealing with real world global issues and problems, approached with empathy and charity gained from learning to see the world through others' eyes.

## **SKILLS**

### **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

#### **FIRST-YEAR WRITING**

##### **Rationale:**

The BYU Mission Statement and the Aims of a BYU Education identify the ability to communicate effectively among the primary skills that students should acquire as part of a broad university education. This requirement is founded on the belief that effective writing is essential to any area of inquiry. It is both a method of learning as well as a means of expressing that learning. Effective writing helps students develop skills in verbal expression and sound thinking, "the ability to engage successfully in logical reasoning, critical analysis, moral discrimination,

creative imagination, and independent thought” (Aims). In particular, the first-year writing requirement prepares students to write effectively in other academic environments, particularly other courses in the University Core. In courses that fulfill this requirement, students learn effective processes of writing, reading, and research, and conventions of academic writing.

## **ADVANCED WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Rationale:**

This requirement expands upon the skills students develop in their first-year writing class by introducing students to the disciplinary nature of academic writing. This requirement is founded on the belief that writing is tied closely to the depth and rigor of an academic concentration that prepares students for the workplace or graduate education. In courses that fulfill this requirement, students learn to write and present for multiple audiences, including specific disciplinary and professional audiences. They learn the rigor of disciplinary writing, reading, and research and refine their skills of verbal expression, both written and oral.

## **QUANTITATIVE REASONING**

### **Rationale:**

The Quantitative Reasoning requirement is designed to fulfill that part of the Aims of a BYU Education which refers to: “Quantitative Reasoning—numerical abilities that equip students with the capacity to understand and explain the world in quantitative terms; to interpret numerical data; and to evaluate arguments that rely on quantitative information and approaches” (Aims, “Intellectually Enlarging”).

## **LANGUAGES OF LEARNING**

### **Rationale:**

In harmony with The Aims of a BYU Education one purpose of general education is to help students “communicate effectively, and . . . reason proficiently in quantitative terms.” Effective communication—“For many students this includes communicating in a second language” (Aims)—and quantitative reasoning require that students have skills which give them entree into the discourse and symbolic systems of multiple disciplines. In the best of circumstances, students would acquire *both* proficiency in at least beginning calculus and the ability to read the literature of and to converse comfortably in a foreign language. However, the university recognizes that many students cannot do both of these while they are undergraduates. Thus, while encouraging the acquisition of both foreign language and advanced quantitative skills, it requires that students have a basic proficiency in two areas—written and oral communication and quantitative reasoning—and that they acquire more substantive, in-depth skill in either quantitative reasoning or a foreign language.

## ARTS, LETTERS, AND SCIENCES

### CIVILIZATION

#### **Rationale:**

The university's Mission Statement affirms the importance of "a broad university education . . . which will help students . . . understand important ideas in their own cultural tradition as well as that of others." This is elaborated in the Aims of a BYU Education, which states that each student should seek to understand "the development of human civilization" and to gain "a general historical perspective, including perspective on one's own discipline." Within this historical perspective, students should acquire "a lively appreciation of the artistic, literary, and intellectual achievements of human cultures. . . ." The Civilization requirement helps students achieve these aims. The two-semester sequence, which divides at ca. AD 1500, is designed to "provide a systematic foundation" and historical framework for other University Core courses "and for the enrichment of the student's major." Further, "in order to initiate a common experience for students at BYU, the sequence will examine certain themes\* and figures\*\* themselves common to all courses satisfying the requirement" (Criteria for Civilization Courses). In summary, the Civilization sequence aims to cultivate in the student:

- a knowledge of those events generally recognized to be formative and fundamental to the history of civilization
- a considered and disciplined exploration of some important questions and themes,\* based at least partly upon the testimony of particular works\*\*
- an understanding, established through active confrontation with individual works,\*\* of their beauty, power, and worth to us. (Criteria for Civilization Courses)

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\*The primary themes, each of which opens up a variety of subsidiary themes, are: What is knowledge? What is a human being? How are human beings related to the divine? What is the place of the individual in a community? What is beauty?

\*\*As a minimum, all sequences meeting the requirement should include the following figures or works: one text from the Old Testament, one text by Homer or a Greek dramatist or a Greek historian, Plato, Aristotle, one work from Roman antiquity, one text from the New Testament, Augustine, either Dante or Aquinas, Machiavelli, one work from the Reformation, Shakespeare, one work illustrative of the Scientific Revolution, either Pope or Hume or Voltaire, one work illustrative of Romanticism, one text by a novelist of the period from Defoe to Dostoevsky, Marx, and one work from the twentieth century. (These works and figures are from the West because, although Civilization courses may be either Western or global in their approach, consideration of Western culture is common to all. In this list, where a "work" is specified it may be textual, visual, or from the performing arts.)

### ARTS

#### **Rationale:**

The arts requirement helps fulfill the mission of BYU "to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life" in seeking out the virtuous, lovely and praiseworthy and is designed to cultivate in each student "a lively appreciation of the artistic . . . achievements of human cultures" (Aims, "Intellectually Enlarging")—an appreciation of the capacity of the visual and

performing arts “to please the eye and gladden the heart” (D&C 59:18) and to address fundamental questions of human experience. Such appreciation is grounded in an understanding of elements, forms, and composition in the arts; in acquaintance with a variety of important works in their respective contexts; and in the development of critical skills and informed aesthetic judgment. Together these lay the foundation for lifelong enjoyment of the arts in ways that lift the spirit and enlighten the mind.

## **LETTERS**

### **Rationale:**

The Letters requirement addresses one of the fundamental reasons for BYU’s existence: “Seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118). The BYU Mission Statement declares that the arts, letters, and sciences constitute the core of the broad university education BYU seeks to provide. In addition, the Aims of a BYU Education document lists among the five broad areas of human knowledge that should be included in an undergraduate education “a lively appreciation of the artistic, literary, and intellectual achievements of human cultures.” The Letters requirement invites students to approach language and literature as a source of knowledge and aesthetic pleasure, a mode of encountering and evaluating diverse minds and attitudes, a vehicle for art and action, a means of historical understanding, and a source of spiritual insight. Consistent with the Aims of a BYU Education, the Letters requirement develops within students “the ability to keep a proper perspective when comparing the things that matter most with things of lesser importance” and “the ability to engage successfully in logical reasoning, critical analysis, moral discrimination, creative imagination, and independent thought.”

## **SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES AND REASONING**

### **Rationale:**

“Discovery,” as the biochemist Albert Szent-Gyorgyi said, “consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought.” Courses fulfilling the Scientific Principles and Reasoning GE requirement—in the biological, physical, and social sciences—encourage students to sense the excitement of discovery. The courses adopt a conceptual framework that focuses on scientific thinking and reasoning as illustrated in a particular discipline. Vocabulary and principles of the discipline are included to provide a meaningful framework for discussion. However, the focus of the course should be on developing the student’s ability to reason using the tools of science rather than mastering large amounts of current scientific knowledge in a particular discipline. Conversely, the class must be more than a sterile presentation of the scientific method. A balance between disciplinary detail and scientific reasoning is ideal. This balance between disciplinary detail and scientific reasoning may vary, however, depending upon certain sequences designated as “Options for Specific Majors” which satisfy both departmental and general education objectives.