

AMERICAN HERITAGE

Foundation Document

Criteria for General Education Certification

Approved by FGEC April 2013

Requirement Purpose

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.

Learning Outcomes

Courses singly or in combinations that fulfill the American Heritage requirement achieve a clear set of student outcomes. Specifically, students should be able to:

1. Explain the historical context within which American independence was declared and won.
2. Compare and contrast the Founders= constitutionalism with more recent concerns of democracy and rights.
3. Identify and discuss the essential features of the United States Constitution as they relate to human freedom and the structures which protect that freedom.
4. Understand the role of competitive economic institutions as an auxiliary to state action.
5. Explain distinctively Latter-day Saint perspectives on the Constitution, including the political and social climate at the time of the restoration.
6. Recognize challenges to the early tradition of American constitutionalism and substantive changes in the interpretation and functioning of the Constitution and our political and economic institutions.
7. Recognize the privileges and responsibilities associated with citizenship in the USA.

Course Characteristics

1. Courses fulfilling the American Heritage requirement must be at least 3 credit hours or in some cases a 6-hour combination of courses.
2. Given the nature of the subject matter, American Heritage 100 has historically been taught by faculty from three departments: Economics, History, and Political Science. Proposals by other departments meeting the above requirements will be considered.
3. Courses will include in their curriculum all the components from the objectives and outcomes above, thereby exposing the students to a broad spectrum of conditions (historical, political, and economic) that shaped the United States to the present day, including the Latter-day Saint perspectives of the founding and shaping of the nation.