

CSU “American Institutions” U.S History, Constitution, and American Ideals

The CSU’s graduation requirements in American Institutions were established in Executive Order 405, separately from the areas of GE Breadth. (The full text of EO 405 is in the appendix to these Guiding Notes.) EO 405 created policy to implement Title 5 Section 40404 of California’s Civil Code, which calls for study in three areas:

1. The historical development of American institutions and ideals (Area US-1),
2. The Constitution of the United States and the operation of representative democratic government under that Constitution (Area US-2), and
3. The process of California state and local government (Area US-3).

While the Executive Order doesn’t set a unit or course minimum for these areas, it’s unusual for a single course to adequately address all three. Instead participating community colleges submit a sequence of courses – typically including courses from their history and/or political science departments – that together meet the graduation requirement in American Institutions.

Following the executive order, reviewers use these criteria for each of the three areas:

Area US-1: American History

Students are expected to learn significant events from U.S. history, as follows:

- ⇒ covering a minimum time span of approximately one hundred years
- ⇒ occurring in the entire area now included in the United States of America
- ⇒ including the relationships of regions within that area and with external regions and powers
- ⇒ the role of major ethnic and social groups
- ⇒ the “continuity of the American experience” (i.e., not a string of isolated events) and its derivation from others cultures, including study of politics, economics, social movements, and/or geography (at least three of the four)

Area US-2: The U.S. Constitution

Course outlines should reflect content that teaches:

- ⇒ the political philosophies of the framers of the Constitution
- ⇒ the operation of United States political process and institutions under the U.S. Constitution
- ⇒ the rights and obligations of individual citizens in the political system established under the Constitution

Area US-3: California State and Local Government

Courses in this area will address:

- ⇒ the Constitution of the State of California
- ⇒ the nature and processes of California state and local government

- ⇒ the relationships between the U.S government and California's state and local governments

Notice that these criteria are extremely detailed. Good courses are often turned down, as reviewers have to consider not only their quality but also how closely they meet these exact criteria, as set by administrative law and CSU policy.

Typical reviewer comments applying to American Institutions

"The outlines will have to be revised to include considerably more information about the courses' coverage of the U.S. and California state constitutions and the nature and processes of the federal, state, and local governments."

"The course content section of the outline does not address the political philosophies of the framers of the U.S. Constitution or the Constitution of the State of California"

"The course content appears to focus largely on the American Southwest, not the entire area now comprising the U.S."

"This course covers a time span of 62 years, which is considerably less than the 100-year time span that is expected of courses meeting the historical elements of the requirement."

"This course in the history of Armenian Americans is too narrowly focused on a single population to qualify for US-1."