

California History-Social Science Project

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Dear Professors Nelson and Collins,

As representatives of the California History-Social Science Project (CHSSP), a network of K-16 educators dedicated to improving student learning in history-social science, we write in support of continued American Institutions course requirements for all students within the California State University system.

Our network of classroom teachers, university scholars, and teacher educators served as the Primary Writers of California's History-Social Science Framework – statewide guidance for K-12 teachers that includes both grade-level course descriptions and a pedagogical approach that integrates an inquiry model with content and literacy instruction. The Framework is aligned to California's History-Social Science Standards, which organize content by grade level. U.S. History, for example, is taught in grades 5 (early exploration to the founding of the country), 8 (primarily 19th century), and 11 (20th century). The U.S. government course is taught as a semester course in 12th grade. This division of content by century is designed to avoid repetition throughout the grade levels. However, this division often means that students only study the history of our country's founding when they are ten or eleven years old.

Moreover, in some elementary and middle schools, especially those in schools where students are not reading at grade level or are far behind their peers in mathematics, often clustered in impoverished communities in California, teachers have been discouraged from teaching history at all, as well as other marginalized subjects, in order to dedicate more class time to English / Language Arts and Mathematics. What this means, in effect, is that students have graduated from high school and enter the CSU without a substantial understanding of our country's colonial era, for example, or, the founding of the republic, the history of slavery in the United States, the Civil War, or Reconstruction.

The eleventh-grade history-social science curriculum is titled 'United States History and Geography: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century.' Nothing prior to the twentieth century is emphasized in any depth in high school history classes. A course that meets the CSU American Institutions requirement is far from a simple repeat of an eleventh-grade history class.

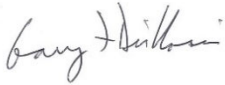
No one could expect a fifth grader to truly grasp the devastating impact on Native Americans of the arrival of colonists from Europe, for example, nor for an eighth grader to comprehend the profound and long-lasting effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction. But if fifth and eighth grade are the only times that students encounter those eras of history, then as adults they cannot help but be hindered in their understanding of the modern world. These are topics that *adult* college students, not just fifth, eighth, or even eleventh graders, must learn and understand. It is also worth noting that the CSU enrolls a growing population of students who come from other countries, who have never learned any US history prior to their arrival, and many of whom remain in the US after graduation or return to their home countries to play important

roles there. It is hard to imagine any topic more crucial for voting citizens and other residents in our nation to study and discuss than a nuanced and analytical history of the United States.

The CSU has a long relationship with history and social science teachers in California. For the past 29 years, the California History-Social Science Project has brought history teachers together, from both K-12 and higher education, to articulate our curriculums at the different grade levels. Many history teachers received their degrees from CSU campuses and many CSU historians have worked closely with student teachers and expert teachers to ensure that, between the courses they take at the various grade levels, our shared students gain a deep and increasingly mature understanding of American history and institutions. The CSU American Institutions requirement is an essential part of this mission. Its role cannot be filled by random college courses chosen by students from a menu of possibilities in the social sciences, nor can it be filled by a high school history course that only covers the twentieth century, at a level suitable for 16-year-olds.

We urge you to keep the American Institutions requirement as an essential part of the general education curriculum; the US history courses taught to undergraduates will thereby continue to build on what children learn in school so as to prepare CSU graduates, as adults, to be thoughtful and knowledgeable participants in our nation's democratic institutions.

Sincerely,



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