

What We Look for In Reviewing “American Institutions” Course Outlines

CSU reviewers use a matrix of review criteria when evaluating course outlines submitted for US History, Constitution, and American Ideals (“American Institutions” or “AI”) approval. The review criteria were developed from the requirements specified in CSU Executive Order 405, which operationalizes the requirements set forth in Title 5 Section 40404.

Reviewers consider not necessarily the strength of a course as a history, government, or political science offering in general but consider its fit within the requirements of administrative law and CSU policy. That does cause some difficulty, as we sometimes see that good courses cannot be accepted for American Institutions.

Courses that meet the American Institutions requirements fall into three areas, as specified in Title 5:

- 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).**

Cross-listed courses may be submitted for these areas, and those meeting the review criteria established for the US History, Constitution, and American Ideals graduation requirement will be approved. However, we have found that because American Institutions history courses are expected to take into consideration a very broad examination of US history and peoples, it is difficult for more narrowly defined courses or courses outside the history discipline to meet the criteria. It has also been our experience that reviewers tend not to support outlines that attempt to include in one course the content required for all three areas. It is simply too difficult to provide students a sufficient foundation in all three areas within one course in one term.

CSU Executive Order 405 specifies this course content for the American Institutions Areas, and these are therefore the same elements our reviewers consider when evaluating proposed AI course outlines:

- **Significant events**
- **100 years span**
- **Entire area that is now the U.S.**
- **Relationships with external regions, powers**
- **Role of major social groups**
- **Continuity of American experience**
- **Derivation from other cultures**
- **Political philosophies of framers of U.S. Constitution**
- **Operation of political institutions, processes under U.S. Constitution**
- **Rights and obligations of citizens under U.S. Constitution**
- **California state Constitution**
- **Nature and processes of California state and local government**
- **Relationships of state and local government with federal government**

Reviewers look for a strong foundation in these areas and tend not to approve courses with passing references to or minimal emphasis on these criteria.

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**CSU Course Outline Review Criteria
United States History, Constitution, and American Ideals Areas 1, 2, and 3**

Institution _____

Course _____

Date Reviewed _____

APPROVED

DENIED

CSU Reviewer _____

Area US-1

Area US-2

Area US-3

Courses meeting the American Institutions requirements specified in Title 5 fall into these three areas:

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

Area and Criterion	Sufficient	Insufficient
Area US-1		
Significant events		
100 years		
Entire area that is now the U.S.		
Relationship of regions within U.S. area		
Relationships with external regions, powers		
Role of major ethnic groups		
Role of major social groups		
Continuity of American experience		
Derivation from other cultures		
Area US-2		
Politics, economics, social movements, geography (at least 3)		
Political philosophies of framers of U.S. Constitution		
Operation of political institutions, processes under U.S. Constitution		
Rights and obligations of citizens under U.S. Constitution		
Area US-3		
California state Constitution		
Nature and processes of California state and local government		
Relationships of state and local government with federal government		

Review criteria sources: [Title 5 Section 40404](#); [CSU EO 405](#)