

Guidelines for Humanities Course Graduation Requirement

Background: Idaho used to require 4 credits in the Humanities, 2 which had to be Fine Arts and 2 that could include what was then called “Practical Arts,” or vocational courses. In circa 1999, the legislature made a change in this requirement, when the rule sunsetted on the original requirement. The requirement was changed from 4 to 2 credits. However, the new rule eliminated the “Practical Arts” allowance. Most districts have a good understanding of this change, but some still count “Practical Arts” courses for humanities credits, which is incorrect. In 2000 Humanities Standards were created for Visual and Performing Arts, Interdisciplinary Humanities, World History, and World Language. A few years later, the World History Standards under the Humanities were eliminated for two reasons: 1) World History Standards already existed in the History Standards, as a history elective 2) World History could be taught in an interdisciplinary fashion, with a major emphasis on arts and culture and meet the Interdisciplinary Humanities Standards.

Clarification on Meeting the Standards: Any course, whether music, art, dance, visual art, world language, or interdisciplinary humanities must address the three Idaho Humanities Standards: 1) History and Culture 2) Critical Thinking 3) Performance. Most courses easily cover two of the three standards but might ignore the third one. What is being taught is ever more important than simply a course title or course description. A music class that is pure performance and does not instruct in theory or historical backgrounds of music being learned does not really meet the Humanities Requirement. Same with an academic interdisciplinary course: if it covers history and culture, includes critical thinking, but does not have a valid performance component, it does not meet the Humanities Requirement. Every teacher should pay close attention to how well he/she addresses all of the three standards.

Clarification on World History: If your school is counting a World History course as meeting the Humanities Graduation Requirement the following should be true: the course deals significantly with the arts and culture of the time period being studied as well as the traditional social and political events. The course must have a performance component—usually through exploratory projects, performing arts presentations, or writing other than expository. The course will not typically cover as much “ground” on a historical timeline because other disciplines in the arts are key components in this interdisciplinary approach. If the teacher is using a traditional World History textbook and teaching World History from ancient civilization to the modern world, the emphasis is most likely not interdisciplinary, but a history course with a few “art” assignments included.

Clarification on Interdisciplinary: This route to addressing the Humanities requirement is the most open to interpretation. The ability to create a unique course that draws upon the teacher’s strengths is the reason for this choice. A teacher with a strong Spanish background who also has strong interest in art may combine language and art for

an interdisciplinary course—as long as all three standards are met. Other combinations, such as literature and history, music and dance are feasible. Courses may concentrate on a time period, such as the 60's, and cover the music, art, historical events of that single decade. Other courses may be thematic in nature, covering an idea such as Impressionism and following its meaning through music and visual art. Teachers of Interdisciplinary Humanities courses will seldom find one definitive textbook to follow. Few interdisciplinary texts are published—the instructor makes use of multiple resources related to the subject of the course. Lastly, to be highly qualified, the instructor should possess a Humanities endorsement. Many teachers probably qualify for this endorsement and need to refer to the Certification page on the SDE website to determine if they could add this endorsement.

Clarification on Social Sciences: Courses such as psychology, sociology, geology, and economics are social science courses and should be counted as electives rather than a Humanities requirement.

Clarification on Literature or History: Courses in pure literature or history are electives and may only count as Humanities courses if they are taught in conjunction with other arts disciplines and adhere to the Humanities Standards for Interdisciplinary Humanities. The teacher should possess a Humanities endorsement. For example, a course in Shakespeare would typically qualify for a literature elective, whereas a course in The Renaissance, which covers the literature, history, music, art of the Renaissance could qualify for the Humanities requirement. A course in “The Novel” is approached as a literature elective, whereas “Books, Illumination, and Design” could follow the Interdisciplinary Standards. World History could be counted either as a history elective or an Interdisciplinary Humanities course, depending upon its emphasis. See above.

Clarification on “Practical Arts”: Such classes meant to teach a vocational skill, such as business, technology, agriculture, child development, accounting, landscaping, woodworking, health professions, construction, culinary arts, leadership skills—formerly known as “Practical Arts” do not count for the Humanities requirement. None of the humanities standards outline knowledge and skills for these courses.

A Look to the Future: As of May, 2010, SEADAE (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education) have moved to create Common Core Standards in the Arts. The target date for a rollout of these standards is December 2011. A new category, media arts, will be strongly considered as the fifth category of traditional fine arts (music, dance, theatre, visual arts). Also, Idaho has a bit of a headstart on the concept of interdisciplinary standards, which will also be strongly considered in the Common Core Standards in the Arts. Look for more information on this exciting work on the Arts and Humanities website: <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/academic/arts-humanities/>