

School of Arts and Sciences
Committee on Undergraduate Education

Recommended Definition of the Cross-Cultural Analysis Requirement
December 8, 2005

To prepare for an increasingly interconnected world, Penn students should develop the ability to understand and interpret the cultures of peoples with histories different from their own. It is important, therefore, that students learn methods of analyzing alternative systems of living and making meaning. This might encompass the art of close, careful reading of texts, pictures, and other artifacts of culture and their analysis, interpretation, and placement in a larger context. Or it might include social immersion in or the ethnographic study of an unfamiliar locality. Our aim is to develop intellectual habits necessary for a lifetime of understanding diverse cultures and societies and to encourage a thoughtful approach that stresses different ways of looking at the world.

The Cross-Cultural Analysis Requirement aims to increase students' knowledge and understanding of socio-cultural systems outside the United States. The focus may be on the past or the present, and it should expose students to distinctive sets of values, attitudes, and methods of organizing experience that may not be obtained from American cultures. This exposure to the internal dynamic of another society should lead students to understand the values and practices that define their own cultural framework.

The study of other cultures is much enhanced by the study of foreign languages. We encourage students to fulfill the Cross-Cultural Analysis requirement by taking advanced-level classes in literature, culture, and history taught in the language of a particular country or region.

Courses proposed for this requirement should convey the "local knowledge" of another culture, as made visible in its social practices and institutions. To fulfill this Cross-Cultural Analysis requirement any course should address some or all of the following questions with respect to the culture or cultures it considers:

1. Does the course examine the social values, institutions, and patterns of organization of a culture from within its own perspective?
2. Does the course consider the relationships between some of the following aspects of the culture(s) in question: art, religion, literature, philosophy, social behavior and institutions, and responses to other cultures?
3. If the course focuses on a particular element in a culture, does it also devote substantial attention to the relationship between that specific element and other more general aspects?
4. Does the course teach students the methods required for sensitive and critical cultural analyses, such as the informed reading of texts, artifacts, and social institutions?