

North Carolina

(Source: *The North Carolina Social Studies Standard Courses of Study, 2002*, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction)

The five criteria: An overview

Are the essentials of a civic core specified clearly?	Are the topics teachable within the allotted timeframe?	Do the documents provide a scope and sequence?	Is the essential content required of all students?	Are the important facts and ideas presented coherently across subjects?
☆	☆	★	★	☆

Standards that largely meet the criteria are designated with a full star [★]; standards that partially meet the criteria are designated with a half star [☆]; and standards that do not meet the criteria are designated with an empty star [☆].

Summary:

This 122-page document, based on both the NCSS standards and national standards for the separate disciplines, does not meet either Criterion #1 or #2. Specific events, persons, and ideas on civics and history are scarce throughout middle and high school, and the implied content of numberless general “objectives” could not be taught in the usual school time.

Criterion #3 is met by a kindergarten to grade twelve sequence: in fourth grade, North Carolina geography and history; in fifth, U.S. history, Canada, Mexico, Central America; in sixth, South America and Europe; in seventh, Africa, Asia, and Australia; in eighth, North Carolina history/geography again; in ninth, a world history survey from earliest civilizations to the present; in tenth, civics and economics; in eleventh, U.S. history; in twelfth, social science electives. Criterion #4, on equal requirements, is only partly met by planned end-of-course tests in grade eleven U.S. history and at the ninth grade level in “Economic, Legal and Political Systems” (curiously, a year before the course in civics and economics). On Criterion #5, there is minimal integration among eight social studies strands—individual identity and development; cultures and diversity; government and active citizenship; historic perspectives; geographic relationships; economics and development; global connections; and technological influences and society. Instead, as in other documents following the format of the national social studies standards, they needlessly scatter things better taught together.

Particulars:

State law mandates “specific areas” in the social studies: Americanism, North Carolina and U.S. government, the free enterprise system, the “major principles” of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, its amendments, “the most important of the Federalist Papers,” two years of North Carolina history/geography, and “various racial and ethnic groups’ contribution to the development and diversity of the state.”

The document has such items, but it fails to specify other events, ideas, personalities, and turning-points in U.S. and world history that would meet the NCSS dictum: “the primary purpose of the social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions.” Instead, its writers quote and agree with the NCSS on two clearly incompatible notions: one, “social studies encompasses many more potential goals and content clusters than can be addressed adequately”; and two, “all students, kindergarten to twelve, should have access to the full richness of the social studies curriculum.” If “full richness” can-

not be adequately taught, to any or all, selection is imperative for a common core of learning that all have a right to be offered. No selection is evident here.

The grade five course is ostensibly on the history of the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and “selected countries of Central America” from exploration to now. But of 44 “objectives,” 36 are on geography, current government, ethnicity, cultures, economics, and technology. Among the eight on history are “Explain when, where, why, and how groups of people settled in different regions of the United States” and “Describe the contributions of people of diverse cultures throughout the history of the United States.”

Of 43 “objectives” in grade six, two are in history (“Identify historical events such as invasions, conquests, and migrations and evaluate their relationship to current issues” and “Examine the causes of key historical events in selected areas of South America and Europe and analyze the short and long range effects on political, economic, and social institutions”). Typical of the broad items not under history are: “Examine key ethical ideas and values deriving from religious, artistic, political, economic, and educational traditions, as well as their diffusion over time, and assess their influence on development of selected societies and regions in South America and Europe,” and “Examine the major belief systems in selected regions of South America and Europe, and analyze their impact on cultural values, practices, and institutions.” Not only are similar questions repeated in the next grade, but so general are the questions that the grade seven course (on Africa, Asia, and Australia) carries the same 43 objectives in identical words, with only the regional names changed.

Despite these problems, the grade nine world history pages claim to build “on the knowledge students have gained in the cultural geographic studies in grades five, six, and seven.” Of 47 sweeping objectives, half of them would be more appropriate for doctoral candidates (e.g., “Characterize over time and place the interactions of world cultures”). Embodied in the grade nine objectives are some 170 separate, substantial topics, but without mention of Greek political ideas, of Athenian democracy and its fall (instead, a typically sweeping item: “Identify the roots of Greek civilization and recognize its achievements from the Minoan era through the Hellenistic period”). There is nothing on Rome’s Republic, on feudalism, the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, Enlightenment ideas, the “isms” or social and political reforms of the nineteenth century or, later, the Great Depression, fascism, the fall of Weimar Germany and rise of Nazism, or the Holocaust.

Grade eight, on the history of North Carolina in the context of United States history from pre-Columbian times to the present, and grade eleven, on United States history from 1789 to the present, are similarly unrealistic surveys. Only by leaving great gaps in the narrative of ostensibly required content could teachers manage studies in depth, connections to the arts and literature, and time to reflect with students on the significance of historical events, ideas, personalities, and turning-points for American life in recent decades. There is no mention either in the grade ten civics/economics course or in the grade eleven U.S. history course of Old World sources of American political thought, from Judaic-Christian ideas to the Anglo-American political heritage and Enlightenment thought.

North Carolina’s document is an earnest effort to combine most of the themes, concepts, and questions of the standards issued by the National Council for the Social Studies, with most of the general demands made by authors of national standards in civics, economics, geography, and history. The result is a set of standards that is not teachable in the time teachers have, yet also fails to include priorities of importance to American students. Thus, North Carolina’s new document does not improve on the past. As in many other states, most of the raw material is here, or implied, and could be reworked by expert teachers and scholars into a document that could support a “civic core,” as well as other social studies themes.