OREGON • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE	SCORES		TOTAL SCORE
F	Content and Rigor	1/7	2/10
	Clarity and Specificity	1/3	

Overview

Oregon's U.S. history standards are vague to the point of absurdity. The content—assigned to grade bands, not individual grades—is scanty, gap-ridden, and hopelessly general, not even approaching a usable historical outline. And what little content there is focuses heavily on the mistreatment of minorities, all but ignoring other aspects of the nation's past.

Goals and Organization

Oregon provides "social science" standards for grade bands K–3, 4–5, 6–8, and high school. Each grade-band outline is divided among five strands: civics and government, economics, geography, history, and social science analysis.

The strands are further divided into thematic sub-strands, common across all grades; within each sub-strand, one or more headings lay out broad content expectations for the grade band. More detailed content items are sometimes supplied beneath such headings.

The history strand is, in all grade bands, divided into nine sub-strands: five "historical skills" headings (covering chronology; cause and effect; continuity and change; diverse perspectives; and connections among economic, social, political, and cultural spheres) in addition to world history, U.S. history, and two state and local history sub-strands. If U.S. history content is assigned to a given grade band, the heading beneath the "U.S. history" sub-strand indicates the time span to be covered in that grade band (the middle school grade band's U.S. history heading, for instance, directs students to "understand how individuals, issues, and events changed or significantly influenced the course of U.S. history post-American Revolution through 1900").

The grade band covering Kindergarten through third grade contains no specific U.S. history content; the scarce content under the history strand mentions calendars, chronological sequences, and "events from local history."

The U.S. history sequence is split into a single course over the grade bands for fourth and fifth grade, sixth through eighth grade, and high school. The fourth- and fifth-grade band covers pre-settlement to the American Revolution; the sixth- through eighth-grade band from the Revolution to 1900; and the high school band from 1900 to the present.

Evaluation

Oregon claims to have "adopted world-class academic standards" in social sciences, calling its Standards by Design "a comprehensive blueprint" for academic content that

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED[1]

Oregon Standards by Design: Third Grade, Fifth Grade, Eighth Grade and High School for Social Sciences, U.S. history segments (2001)

Accessed from:

http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/standards/sbd.aspxOregon Standards by Design: Third Grade, Fifth Grade, Eighth Grade and High School for Social Sciences, U.S. history segments (2001)

1 Oregon's social science standards are provided in two forms: a pdf of the original standards released in 2001 and a more recent interactive "Standards by Design" website. While the presentation and organization differ, the content of both is identical. For the purposes of this review, we evaluated the "Standards by Design" version, the most up-to-date form of the standards. Oregon also has a set of draft standards, dated November 2010, available here: http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/subjects/socialscience/standards/oregon_k-12_ss_standards_10-27-10.pdf. Since these standards have not yet been formally adopted, and could likely still undergo substantive changes, they were not included in this review.

clearly outlines "what students should know and be able to do." The standards document also "gratefully acknowledges the Indiana Department of Education for allowing the modification of some of their materials for use in this document."

This seems like a promising start, especially since Indiana's U.S. history standards are among the best in the land. Furthermore, by using the term "social sciences," Oregon seems to be distancing itself from the flawed conceptual models of social studies. Sadly, closer examination of the Oregon standards reveals the usual social studies strands and skills categories. And Oregon's content outlines bear scant resemblance to Indiana's clear and detailed standards.

Early grades are assigned no history content at all. Kindergarten through third grade receives just two content headings: a directive to "understand calendar time sequences and chronological sequences within narratives" and another to "understand events from local history." American "national symbols, heroes, and patriotic songs" are mentioned under civics, without any examples, as is a directive to "identify the rights that people have in their communities."

American history, such as it is, enters in fourth and fifth grades. The heading under the U.S. history sub-strand instructs students to "understand how individuals, issues, and events changed or significantly influenced the course of U.S. history from pre-history through the period of the American Revolution." The U.S. history headings for sixth through eighth grade and high school are identical, save for the time period named.

Under this broad heading, fourth and fifth grade receive *five* content items for the entire period. Students are to:

- "Identify and understand the groups living in the Western Hemisphere before European exploration, their ways of life, and the empires they developed."
- "Understand the impact of early European exploration on Native Americans and on the land."
- "Understand the impact of individuals through the period of the American Revolution, on ideas, ways of life, or the course of events in U.S. history."
- "Understand the colonial experience and how it led to the American Revolution."
- "Identify and understand the causes, course, and impact of the American Revolution, including the roles of George Washington, Samuel Adams, and Thomas Jefferson."

One might just as well direct students to "understand American history through the Revolution," and leave it at that.

Grades six through eight, ostensibly covering the period from the Revolution to 1900, provide only fifteen content items. The sparse content focuses heavily on the oppression of minority groups, while swaths of basic history are ignored. There are brief references to "the issues and events" of the Constitutional Convention, along with Jacksonian democracy, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Students are also to understand the effects of westward migration, Manifest Destiny, immigration, and urbanization "on indigenous populations and newcomers," but not, it seems, in any other terms. They are also to focus on the slave trade, abolitionism, the "experiences of enslaved African-Americans"—itself a contrived and historically disingenuous term—"and 'free Blacks' in the United States" as well as "how African-Americans dealt with the conditions of their enslavement and used religion and family to create a viable culture to cope with the effects of slavery." After Reconstruction, they are mainly to focus on "the effects of Indian Wars and the opening of the West on Native American tribes," the Irish potato famine—which of course occurred *before* the Civil War—and the general "effect of territorial expansion on other nations and their people."

There is hardly a reference to any specific individual or event; injustices to various groups receive most of the segment's limited attention. The establishment and expansion of American democracy are all but ignored.

Matters get even worse in high school, where the U.S. history segment devotes just *seven content items to the entire post–1900 period*. Students are to understand nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reform movements, "the concerns, successes, and limitations of Progressivism," and how new technologies transformed work and labor in the twentieth century. They are then to digest "the changes in society and culture in the early 20th century," along with "the causes of the Great Depression" and its effect "on the American family;" how Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal "addressed the Great Depression, redefined the role of government, and had a profound impact on American life;" and "the changes that created the economic boom after World War II." Some decontextualized references to the civil rights movement and modern constitutional interpretation appear under civics—and that's it. There is nothing approaching a coherent or usable historical outline.

Content and Rigor Conclusion

Oregon's standards provide only hints of historical content—so broad, selective, and fragmentary as to verge on the ludicrous. There are no specifics at any point; even the overly general directives leave gaps. Much of American history's space is given over to the negative experiences of minority

groups. The other side of American history, the struggle for democracy and justice, is essentially ignored. The decision to split the entire U.S. history sequence into a single course over grade bands ranging from fourth grade through high school would matter if any of the grade levels demanded content and rigor. But, in fact, the high school course provides no greater sophistication than does the fourth- and fifth-grade course—early periods are shortchanged, and later eras are treated no better. The extremely general references to actual historical content earn Oregon a marginal one out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Not only does Oregon provide minimal curricular detail and divide material into arbitrary strands, it provides outlines only for broad grade bands, not individual grades. In addition, the outlines are splintered into thematic and conceptual strands and sub-strands. And the content split among those subdivisions lacks detail or specificity. Such empty, content-free standards provide hardly any guidance to teachers in structuring a course, and they give students little sense of what is expected. Oregon claims to have "adopted world-class academic standards." If so, the authors of these standards seem to be living in a world of their own invention. The state barely receives a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)