



September 2005

## UC Policies for High School Course Approval

The Association of Christian Schools International, the Calvary Chapel Christian School in Murrieta, California, and six Calvary Chapel students have filed suit against the University of California. The plaintiffs claim that the University violated the freedom of speech and religion rights of some Christian schools when it concluded that some of their courses did not meet the University's requirements for college preparation. They also allege that students who attend these schools are therefore discriminated against in the University's admission process.

### Background

The University of California reviews and assesses high school courses that are submitted to the University for approval as meeting the UC system's college preparatory course requirements – known as the a-g requirements – to assure that these courses include appropriate subject-matter content to meet UC academic standards. These requirements are intended to ensure that students coming to the University are conversant with accepted educational and scientific content and methods of inquiry at the level required for UC students and typically expected of educated citizens in the competitive workforce. In addition to completing the a-g curriculum, UC-bound students of course are free to take whatever additional courses they wish, including any religion courses their schools offer.

*The University welcomes students from a wide range of academic settings. Enrolling students from many different faiths and backgrounds enriches the University's community and the learning experience of our students. In fact, UC accepts courses from hundreds of schools affiliated with many religious faiths, and the University offers multiple alternative ways for students to meet the UC system's entrance requirements.*

### UC's course-approval process

- The University fully recognizes the right of public and private school personnel to select instructional materials for their students in their course curricula. Not every course must meet UC's college preparatory requirements, and the University makes no attempt to restrict what any private or public school chooses to teach.
- In the context of admissions, however, UC under the California Constitution does have the authority and responsibility to establish academic standards for admission to the University and to determine whether specific coursework submitted by a high school will count as fulfilling UC's college preparatory requirements.
- UC's course-approval process applies to all California high schools, including public, private, and charter schools, which propose new or substantially revised courses they wish to be counted as a-g courses.
- For a course to be approved as an a-g course, the school must submit a request with the course curriculum, textbook information, and other supplemental materials to the University for approval. To assist schools in creating approved course outlines, UC publishes a comprehensive guide at [www.ucop.edu/doorways/guide](http://www.ucop.edu/doorways/guide). The website describes the a-g requirements, provides dozens of sample course descriptions for both standard and innovative courses, offers useful tools and resources, and answers frequently asked questions.
- The course approval process is interactive. If a course is not initially approved, University officials are available to provide additional assistance, through a collaborative consultation process, to help the schools create course outlines that meet the University's requirements. More than 80 percent of courses submitted to UC are approved.

## UC admission requirements

The University's standards for admission apply to all students, regardless of the kind of school they attend. Students who have not taken a full curriculum of UC-approved college preparatory courses may nevertheless gain admission to the UC system in several ways:

- Students can demonstrate their understanding of the key knowledge and concepts in specific fields by passing standardized tests in these areas.
- Students can complete a course in the same subject at a local community college.
- Students who are missing many courses or attend a high school that does not have an approved course list can become eligible for admission "by examination alone" or "by exception." Students seeking eligibility by examination alone need to meet higher minimum scores than students who submit test scores in addition to grades in approved courses. Students who are admitted by exception are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Details on these alternatives are available at [www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/undergraduate.html](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/undergraduate.html).

## Specifics of the lawsuit

UC has approved 43 courses at Calvary Chapel as a-g college preparatory courses, and these courses cover all disciplines, including science. However, Calvary Chapel's applications for *certain* courses were not approved, for a number of reasons. In one case, a literature course was rejected because the use of an anthology as the only textbook was in direct conflict with UC's policy that students read assigned works in their entirety, meaning anthologies may not be the only texts required in literature courses.

Some of the courses rejected by UC used certain textbooks published by Bob Jones University Press and A Beka Books as primary instructional materials. Although UC has approved courses that use other textbooks from these publishers, these books were reviewed by faculty who concluded they did not meet UC's guidelines for primary textbooks. Had the courses at issue used these textbooks as supplementary, rather than primary, texts, it is likely they would have been approved.

*The question the University must confront in reviewing these texts is not whether they have religious content, but whether they provide a comprehensive view of the relevant subject matter, reflecting knowledge generally accepted in the scientific and educational communities and with which a student at the university level should be conversant.* In the books in question, the publishers themselves acknowledge that the primary goal is to teach religious doctrine rather than the scholarship that is generally accepted in the relevant fields of study. For example, the introduction to the primary textbook for the science courses in question states clearly that it teaches students that their conclusions must conform to the Bible, and that scientific material and methods are secondary:

*"The people who have prepared this book have tried consistently to put the Word of God first and science second. To the best of the author's knowledge, the conclusions drawn from observable facts that are presented in this book agree with the Scriptures. If a mistake has been made (which is probable since this book was prepared by humans) and at any point God's Word is not put first, the author apologizes." (Source: Biology for Christian Schools, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition / Bob Jones University Press, p. vii.)*

The University has declined to approve courses that use as their primary source the books named in the case, not because they have religious content, but because they fail to meet the University's standards for effectively teaching the required subject matter. Again, the University does not approve whether the school can teach the course or use the text, but whether students who take the course will have it counted as having met a college preparatory requirement at UC.