



# A Closer Look at Secondary Content in the Social Sciences

## Undergraduate Secondary Programs

**KEY FINDINGS:** Forty-five states and the District of Columbia fail to require licensing tests that ensure all secondary social studies<sup>1</sup> teachers have adequate content knowledge. In states with inadequate tests, a review of the program requirements finds only 56 percent of general social studies certification routes to require adequate coursework. Notably, fifty-one general social studies certification routes spread across 28 programs require either one or no history courses, the subject a teacher candidate is most likely to teach.

### Why teacher prep programs should have strong content requirements for secondary social studies certifications

Teachers cannot teach what they do not know. For decades, teacher prep and higher education reformers attempted to improve the rigor of undergraduate teacher prep programs by promoting the requirement of academic majors for prospective secondary teachers. Research generally supported this action, as strong subject-matter expertise was found to promote better instruction, especially at the high school level. The passage of *No Child Left Behind* made content mastery paramount with the “highly qualified” designation that requires high school teachers to either have completed a major in the subject they teach or pass a rigorous test in that subject, which is this standard’s benchmark for certifications that allow instruction in a single subject. Complicating the aim of content mastery is the multiple-subject general social studies certification that permits a teacher to teach in all of the high school social studies. Where this “teach everything” certification is found, programs earn an A on this standard if they require at least 15 SCH in history and in one of the other core social studies,<sup>2</sup> 30 SCH in history, or 50 SCH across the social studies including at least 15 SCH in history.

For more information about analysis and program grades, see the *Methodology in brief* and *Understanding program grades* sections below.

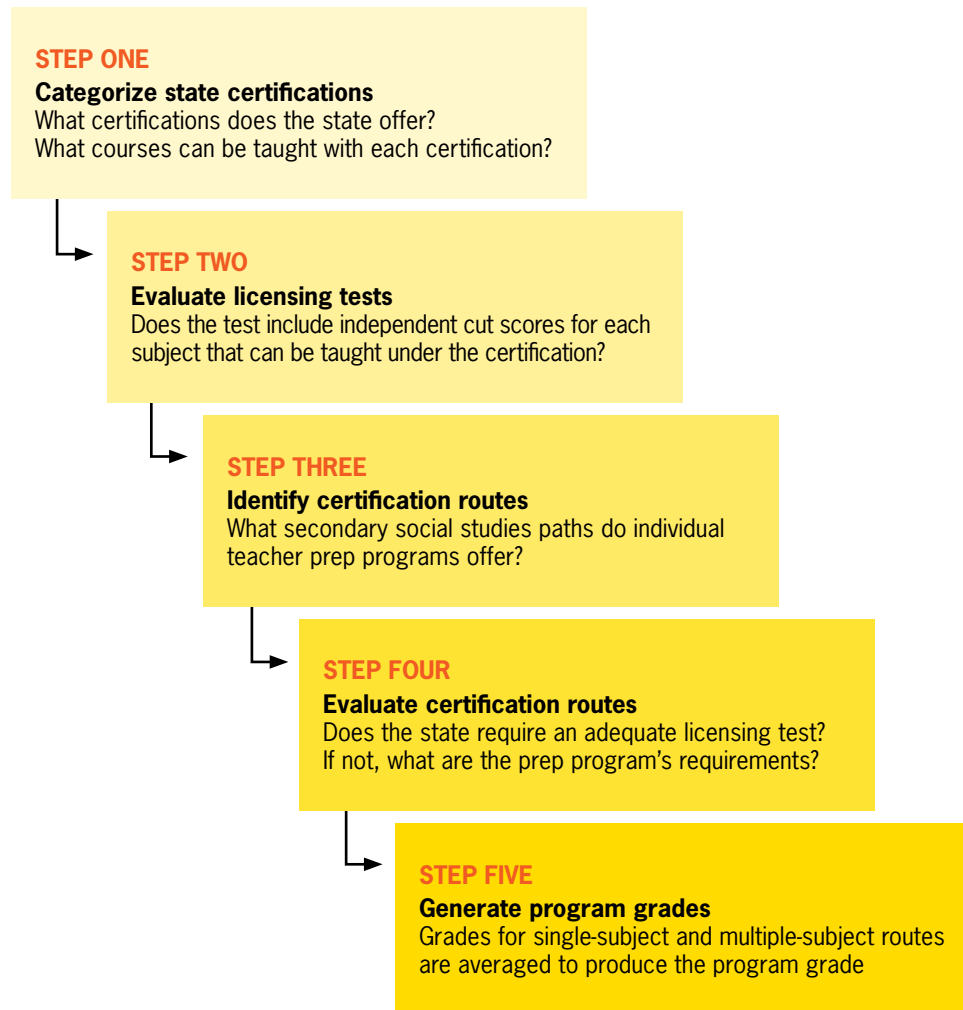
### Key components of analysis

States offer one or more certifications in the social studies. Each certification defines what subjects a teacher can teach. For example, a certification in history allows a teacher to teach history courses, while a general social studies certification allows a teacher to teach all social studies courses including economics, geography, history, political science, and psychology. Teacher preparation programs may offer *certification routes* – a major, minor, or other defined sequence of courses that satisfy state requirements for a specific secondary teacher certification – that lead to some or all of the teaching certifications in the state.<sup>3</sup> Prep programs may differ in what coursework they require for each certification route; however, states can verify content knowledge by requiring a passing score on a licensing test as a condition of certification.

Analysis under this standard considers one or more certification routes for each program. The overall program grade for this standard is based on the analysis of the individual certification routes at each institution. Because of differences between certifications in each state, the evaluation of each certification route progresses through the following steps:

- 1 “Social studies” is used in place of “social sciences” outside of the standard name
- 2 Economics, geography, political science, and psychology
- 3 In some cases, a program may offer multiple routes to the same certification. For example, a candidate may be able to pursue a major in economics, history, or political science to receive the same general social studies certification. The inverse is also found where a single major allows the teacher candidate to choose between multiple certifications.

## Steps of Secondary Content in the Social Sciences analysis



As part of the first step in this process, every certification is categorized as either single subject or multiple subject. Single-subject certification permits instruction exclusively in the subject named in the certification. A history certification that limits instruction to high school history courses is an example of single-subject certification. General social studies certification, which allows instruction in all of the social studies, is categorized as a multiple-subject certification. Social studies certifications are categorized as follows:

Single-Subject Certifications	Multiple-Subject Certifications
Economics Geography History Political Science Psychology Anthropology Sociology	General Social Studies (can teach all of the social studies)

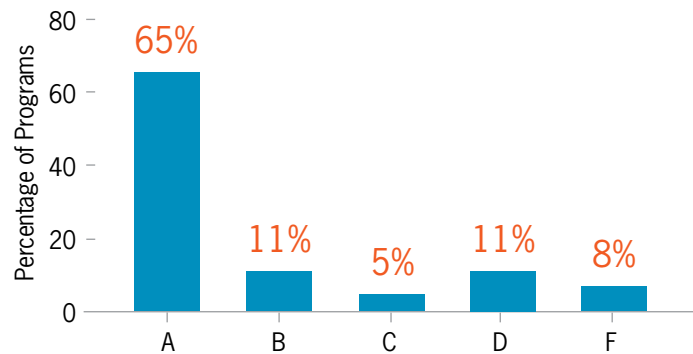
Where states offer a general social studies certification, licensing tests with a single cut score are considered inadequate because it is possible for a teacher candidate to incorrectly answer most or all of the political science questions, for example,

but still score well enough to pass the test and be assigned to teach political science. For general social studies certifications, a licensing test is adequate only if candidates are independently evaluated on their history, political science, economics, and geography content knowledge.

A full explanation of all five steps of analysis under this standard can be found in the [Standard Book](#) for Secondary Content in the Social Sciences.

**How many programs ensure that secondary social studies teacher candidates learn the content they will be expected to teach?**

(N=667 undergraduate secondary programs)



This is the first edition of the *Teacher Prep Review* to include Secondary Content in the Social Sciences. Previously, analysis of secondary social studies certification routes was completed under the High School Content standard. In the 2014 *Teacher Prep Review*, 50 percent of programs were found to earn the equivalent of an A. Since then, the criteria under which general social studies certification routes can satisfy the standard has been expanded to include the requirement of at least 50 SCH across the social studies. As a result, many well-rounded programs that previously fell short of the two-minor threshold now earn an A.

### A closer look at undergraduate social studies content preparation

Teacher prep programs can offer one or more certification routes for as many or as few of the available social studies certifications in the state. In the 27 states and the District of Columbia where general social studies is the only available certification, programs typically offer between one and two certification routes. In the 23 states with some combination of single-subject and multiple-subject certifications, two to three certification routes are most frequently found. This analysis separately evaluates routes leading to single-subject certifications and multiple-subject certification, averaging the grades for the two types of certification to produce an overall grade for the program.

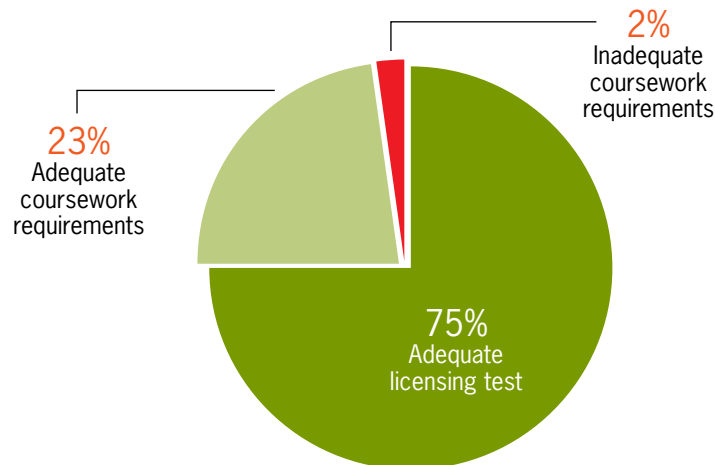
#### Single-subject certification routes

The majority of states offering single-subject certification require adequate licensing tests. Among all single-subject routes for programs in the sample, 75 percent satisfy the standard with the requirement of an adequate licensing test. Only Alaska, Montana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming fail to require adequate tests for single-subject certifications. Where coursework is reviewed in those states, 93 percent of routes pass with the requirement of at least 30 SCH of certification-specific coursework.<sup>4</sup> In total, only 7 out of nearly 400 single-subject certification routes do not satisfy the standard.

<sup>4</sup> Where routes fall short of the 30 SCH threshold, single-subject analysis can also be satisfied with at least 26 SCH in the subject area and at least 12 SCH of supporting coursework. Supporting coursework covers courses that benefit instruction, but fall outside of what is directly taught under a given single-subject certification. As an example, sociology courses are counted as supporting coursework for psychology certification routes.

## Analysis of single-subject certification routes under Secondary Content in the Social Sciences

(N=391 certification routes)



### General social studies certification routes

General social studies certification allows teachers to teach all of the high school social studies. For a state's general social studies licensing test to be deemed adequate, it must provide independent cut scores for each subject that it certifies a teacher to teach. Missouri is one of three states with such a test.<sup>5</sup> In order to teach any of the social studies, teacher candidates in Missouri must independently pass sub-tests covering U.S. history, world history, economics, geography, political science, and the behavioral sciences.

In states without adequate licensing tests, analysts review coursework requirements. To satisfy the standard, a route leading to general social studies certification must require at least 15 SCH of history and 15 SCH in one of the other core social studies or at least 30 SCH of coursework just in history. The standard can also be satisfied with at least 50 SCH of coursework across the social studies with at least 15 SCH required in history.

History receives special consideration because it is the subject teachers are most likely to teach with general social studies certification. A review of high school graduation requirements in the 50 states and the District of Columbia found that states require an average of three years of the social studies. Where state requirements identify course topics, history is most often required for two of those three years.

<sup>5</sup> California and Minnesota also require licensing tests for general social studies certification that contain multiple sub-tests

## Analysis of general social studies certification routes under Secondary Content in the Social Sciences

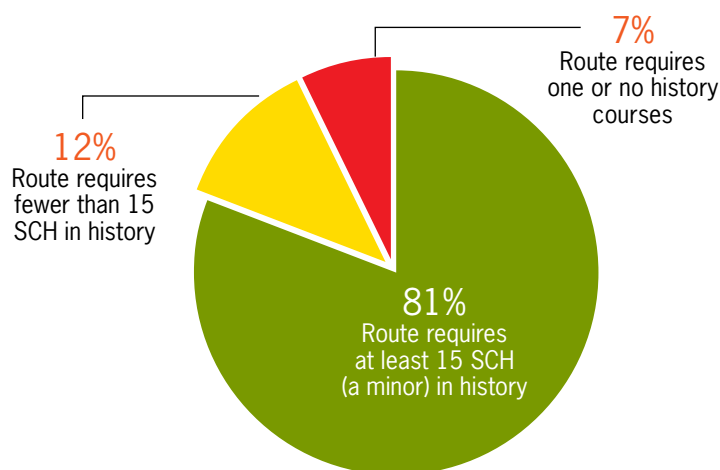
(N=772 certification routes)<sup>6</sup>

Grade for route	Criteria	Percentage of routes earning each grade	
A	General social studies certification route requires one of: 15 SCH in history and in one other core social studies, 30 SCH of history, or at least 50 SCH across the social studies with at least 15 SCH of history coursework	51%	Total: 59%
	An adequate general social studies licensing test is required as a condition of earning certification	8%	
B	General social studies certification route requires at least 42 SCH across the social studies with at least 15 SCH of history coursework	10%	
C	General social studies certification route requires at least 50 SCH across the social studies with fewer than 15 SCH of history coursework	6%	
D	General social studies certification route requires either 30 SCH across the social studies with at least 15 SCH of history or at least 42 SCH across the social studies with fewer than 15 SCH of history coursework	13%	
F	General social studies certification route does not meet the criteria for any of the above grades	12%	

As discussed above, history is the subject teachers are most likely to teach; however, a review of the 707 general social studies certification routes in states without adequate licensing tests finds 19 percent to require fewer than 15 SCH, the equivalent of a minor, in history. Even more alarming, 51 general social studies certification routes offered by 28 programs require either one or no history courses — not even enough to expose a teacher candidate to college-level survey courses in U.S. and world history, the two high school courses social studies teachers are most likely to teach.

## History course requirements within general social studies certification routes

(N=707 certification routes)



## Methodology in brief

We review the course requirements and licensure tests for potential social studies teachers in the context of their state's [social studies certification structure](#). In some states, social studies teachers are certified to teach only one subject (e.g., history), while in others they may be qualified to teach multiple subjects (e.g., a general social studies certification that qualifies a teacher to teach history, political science, economics, and psychology). For single-subject certifications, we look to see if

<sup>6</sup> Includes up to three certification routes from some institutions

aspiring teachers are required to have a major or pass a licensing test in their certification area. For multiple-subject general social studies certifications, we look to see if aspiring teachers are required to take a test with subject-specific scoring or complete at least 50 SCH across the social studies with a minor in history. We also consider a major in history or a minor in history and a minor in one other core social studies area as adequate preparation for general social studies certification.

### Understanding program grades for Secondary Content in the Social Sciences

Each program's letter grade is based on analysis of up to three single-subject and three multiple-subject certification routes. Where both single-subject and multiple-subject routes are offered, the program's grade reflects the average of those two evaluations. Below are the criteria for evaluating individual single-subject and multiple-subject general social studies certification routes.

Grade	Single-subject finding	General social studies finding
<b>A</b>	Adequate licensing test is required - or - At least 30 SCH of certification-specific coursework is required - or - At least 26 SCH of certification-specific coursework and at least 12 SCH of supporting coursework is required	Adequate licensing test is required - or - At least 15 SCH of coursework is required in history and at least 15 SCH is required in either economics, geography, political science, or psychology - or - At least 30 SCH of coursework is required in history - or - At least 50 SCH of coursework is required across the social studies with at least 15 SCH required in history
<b>B</b>	<i>Individual single-subject certification routes cannot receive this grade</i>	At least 42 SCH of coursework is required across the social studies with at least 15 SCH required in history
<b>C</b>	At least 26 SCH of certification-specific coursework and at least 8 SCH of supporting coursework is required	At least 50 SCH of coursework is required across the social studies with fewer than 15 SCH required in history
<b>D</b>	<i>Individual single-subject certification routes cannot receive this grade</i>	At least 30 SCH of coursework is required across the social studies including at least 15 SCH in history - or - At least 42 SCH of coursework is required across the social studies with fewer than 15 SCH required in history
<b>F</b>	Failure to satisfy any of the above criteria	Failure to satisfy any of the above criteria



National Council on Teacher Quality

1120 G Street, NW, Suite 800

Washington, D.C. 20005

Tel: 202 393-0020 Fax: 202 393-0095

Web: [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org)