Ethnic Studies

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Department Chair: Denise A. Isom

Academic Programs

Program name | Program type
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Comparative Ethnic Studies | BA
Ethnic Studies | Minor
Indigenous Studies in Natural Resources and the Environment | Minor

The Ethnic Studies Department uses inter- and multidisciplinary approaches to study the lives of Indigenous, African, Latino/a, and Asian peoples in the United States within a global and postcolonial context. The Ethnic Studies curriculum provides students with unique forms of critical inquiry that advance their analysis of race, ethnicity, and cultural difference in an increasingly heterogeneous and complex world. Courses in Ethnic Studies examine how social hierarchies frame access to political power, allocate economic resources, and influence cultural expression. By critically exploring such issues, students develop not only a greater understanding of the legacy of racism, discrimination, and injustices in the United States, but also a greater appreciation for new and emerging knowledge about diverse American peoples and their global and transnational connections.

Housed in the College of Liberal Arts, the Ethnic Studies Department at Cal Poly encourages critical dialogue about race, ethnicity, postcoloniality, and transnationalism across the entire university curriculum, with special focus on concepts that integrate the arts, humanities, and social sciences, as well as the sciences and technology. The department offers a number of courses that fulfill both general education and United States Cultural Pluralism requirements. A minor in Ethnic Studies is open to all majors and provides a useful complement to the differing types of inquiry used in the wide variety of disciplines throughout the University.

Undergraduate Programs

BA Comparative Ethnic Studies

It is expected that students who demonstrate the foregoing learning outcomes will be better prepared to understand the social, cultural, political, historical, and economic factors that have shaped their own social and occupational identities, as well as the social and occupational identities of others. This knowledge should better prepare students to work, collaborate, and interact more responsibly and effectively in an increasingly diverse and globalized workplace and world.

Ethnic Studies Minor

An Ethnic Studies minor provides students with special competence in the histories and experiences of diverse communities and the critical skills with which to understand complex social issues. Students majoring in subjects across the university curriculum find Ethnic Studies useful, particularly when their interests require a deeper understanding of race, ethnicity, and diversity in the United States and beyond. The minor prepares students for careers in education, government, and community organizations; for entrance to professional schools in areas such as law, social work, and health; and for graduate studies in all areas of the arts and sciences.

Indigenous Studies in Natural Resources and the Environment Minor

An interdisciplinary minor sponsored by the departments of Natural Resources Management and Environmental Sciences and Ethnic Studies. For more information, see the Natural Resources Management and Environmental Sciences (http://catalog.calpoly.edu/collegesandprograms/collegeofagriculturfooenvironmentalsciences/naturalresourcesmanagementenvironmentalsciences/) section.

ES Courses

ES 112. Race, Culture and Politics in the United States. 4 units
2020-21 or later catalog: GE Area D1
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D1
USCP
Introductory and interdisciplinary study of the ways that race and ethnicity are created by both historical processes and American institutional formation - specifically social, political, economic, legal and cultural institutions. Special attention paid to the interlocking systems of race, class, gender and sexuality. 4 lectures. Crosslisted as ES/HNRS 112. Fulfills GE Area D1 and USCP.

ES 114. Introduction to Ethnic Studies. 4 units
USCP
Racial equality movements, including the history of Ethnic Studies (1960’s & 70’s), and the social practices, institutions, cultural representations/discourses, and public policies that construct and reinforce racism, racist ideology, and pseudo-scientific conceptions of race and intersections with gender and class. 4 lectures. Fulfills USCP.

ES 200. Special Problems. 1-4 units
Prerequisite: Consent of department chair.
Supervised investigation, including a written report, of a topic chosen with prior approval of instructor. Total credit limited to 4 units.

ES 212. Global Origins of United States Cultures. 4 units
2020-21 or later catalog: GE Area D2
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D3
USCP
How the global dispersal of Europeans, Asians, and Africans, the hemispheric dispersal of Latin Americans, and the forced internal migration of Native Americans have contributed to American cultural heritage and the struggles for ethnic, class and gender equality, and justice. 4 lectures. Crosslisted as ES/HNRS 212. Fulfills GE Area D2 (GE Area D3 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 215. Planning for and with Multiple Publics. 4 units
USCP
Prerequisite: Completion of GE Area D1. Recommended: ES 112.
How the social/spatial relationships among racial/ethnic and gender groups are expressed in terms of human settlement patterns, civic involvement and everyday negotiations. Ways in which segregation and marginalization are expressed in western and non-western contexts. 4 lectures. Crosslisted as CRP/ES 215. Fulfills USCP.
ES 241. Survey of Indigenous Studies. 4 units
2020-21 or later catalog: GE Area D2
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D3
USCP
A survey of the interdisciplinary field of indigenous studies and specifically the social, political, economic, legal, and cultural institutions of American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian peoples within a transnational and global context. Special attention paid to the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality, particularly within but not limited to the United States. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Area D2 (GE Area D3 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 242. Survey of Africana Studies. 4 units
2020-21 or later catalog: GE Area D2
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D3
USCP
A survey of the interdisciplinary field of Africana Studies and specifically the social, political, economic, legal, and cultural institutions of African American, Afro-Caribbean, and African diasporic peoples within a transnational and global context. Special attention paid to the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality, particularly within but not limited to the United States. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Area D2 (GE Area D3 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 243. Survey of Latino/a Studies. 4 units
2020-21 or later catalog: GE Area D2
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D3
USCP
A survey of the interdisciplinary field of Latino/a Studies and specifically the social, political, economic, legal, and cultural institutions of Chicano/a and other Latino/a peoples within a transnational and global context. Special attention paid to the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality, particularly within but not limited to the United States. Course may be offered in classroom-based or online format. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Area D2 (GE Area D3 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 244. Survey of Asian American Studies. 4 units
2020-21 or later catalog: GE Area D2
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D3
USCP
A survey of the interdisciplinary field of Asian American Studies and specifically the social, political, economic, legal, and cultural institutions of West Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian peoples in the United States within a transnational and global context. Special attention paid to the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality, particularly within but not limited to the United States. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Area D2 (GE Area D3 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 270. Selected Topics. 1-4 units
Prerequisite: Open to undergraduate students and consent of instructor.
Directed group study of selected topics. The Class Schedule will list topic selected. Total credit limited to 8 units. 1 to 4 lectures.

ES 300. Chicano/a Non-Fiction Literature. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area C
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area C4
USCP
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area C.
Overview of contemporary Chicano/a non-fiction literature since 1848. Thematic concerns, literary criticism, literary techniques, historical and socio-cultural factors influencing non-fiction Chicano/a literary genres. Instructor reserves option to select non-fiction genres to be studied. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division C (GE Area C4 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 301. Latina/o Literature of the United States. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area C
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area C4
USCP
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area C.
Latina/o literature written by/for/about Latinas/os in the United States. Topics include literary representation of Latinas/as in the U.S. related to race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, etc. Primary focus on Latina/o literary texts in the mid 20th to early 21st centuries. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division C (GE Area C4 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 302. Chicana/o Literature. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area C
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area C4
USCP
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area C.
Chicana/o literature written by/for/about Chicanas/os in the United States. Topics include literary representation of Chicanos/as in the U.S. related to race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, etc. Primary focus on Chicana/o literary texts in the mid 20th to early 21st centuries. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division C (GE Area C4 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 303. Latina/o Poetry and Politics. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area C
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area C4
USCP
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area C.
Significant Latinx/a/o poetry and poetics from the 19th century to the present. Topics include genre, form, content, politics, and poetics of Latina/o writers of poetry; comparisons/contrasts of different Latina/o ethnic poets and their poetry in different historical periods. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division C (GE Area C4 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.
ES 308. Fire and Society. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
Prequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D.

Prehistorical and historical record of human use of and attitude toward fire. Mythology and religion of fire. Traditional, cultural and ethnic variations and their influence on modern U.S. institutions involved in managing fire. 3 lectures, 1 activity. Crosslisted as ES/NR 308. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs).

ES 310. Hip-Hop, Poetics and Politics. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
USCP
Prequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D. Recommended: Lower-division Ethnic Studies (ES) course in GE Area D.

Dynamics of hip-hop culture, its historical development, political significance, and social influence. How hip-hop exemplifies cross-cultural hybridization within not only Black communities nationally and internationally, but also amongst indigenous, Latino/a, and Asian peoples in the U.S. and beyond. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 311. Beyoncé: Race, Feminism and Politics. 4 units
Prequisite: Completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; completion of GE Area D1; and completion of one USCP course.

Employing an Ethnic Studies lens, Beyoncé body of work and image will serve as a lens through which to explore pop constructions and representations of race, gender, and sexuality as well as the use of those intersecting identities as political tools. 4 lectures.

ES 320. African Americans in Popular Culture. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
USCP
Prequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D. Recommended: Lower-division Ethnic Studies (ES) course in GE Area D.

Cultural studies analysis of the representations of, and counter-representations by, American racial/ethnic groups, with particular emphasis on African Americans. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 321. Native Americans in Popular Culture. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
USCP
Prequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D. Recommended: Lower-division Ethnic Studies (ES) course in GE Area D.

Cultural studies analysis of the representations of, and counter-representations by, American racial/ethnic groups, with particular emphasis on Native Americans. The cultural images of Native peoples in the United States that have characterized relationships. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 322. Asian Americans in Popular Culture. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
USCP
Prequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D. Recommended: Lower-division Ethnic Studies (ES) course in GE Area D.

Cultural studies analysis of the representations of, and counter-representations by, American racial/ethnic groups, with particular emphasis on Asian-Americans. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 323. Latina/os in Popular Culture. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
USCP
Prequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D. Recommended: Lower-division Ethnic Studies (ES) course in GE Area D.

Cultural studies analysis of the representations (racializing images and discourses) of, and counter-representations by, American cultural/ethnic groups with particular emphasis on Mexican Americans/Latinos. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 324. Chicana/o Film. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area C
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area C4
USCP
Prequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area C.

Exploration of how Chicanas/os and their experiences are represented in major films by/for/about them in the United States. Topics include visual/popular culture and film theories, race and representation; film genre; key film concepts. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division C (GE Area C4 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.
ES 325. Sexuality and Gender in African American Communities. 4 units
USCP
Prerequisite: One lower-division course in GE Area D. Recommended: ES 112 or ES 212.

Issues around genders and sexualities that influence the social, political, economic and cultural development of Black America, and challenging anti-Black thought on Black sexual expression. Special attention given to racism, intersectionality, and myths about Black sexuality and gender conventions. 4 lectures. Fulfills USCP.

ES 326. Native American Architecture and Place. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area C
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area C4
USCP
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area C.

The role of culture and setting in the construction of spatial, material and landscape concepts and artifacts, through the introduction of selected North American cultures, with focus from 1300 AD through contemporary time. 4 lectures. Crosslisted as ARCH/ES 326. Fulfills GE Upper-Division C (GE Area C4 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 330. The Chinese American Experience. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
USCP
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D. Recommended: Lower-division Ethnic Studies (ES) course in GE Area D.

History and current status of Chinese Americans, with emphasis on the international contexts, organizations and institutions of Chinese America, and on Chinese Americans’ demographic compositions, spatial patterns, and cultural, socioeconomic, and political adaptation experiences. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 335. The Filipina/o American Experience. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
USCP
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D. Recommended: Lower-division Ethnic Studies (ES) course in GE Area D.

An interdisciplinary examination of the historical development of Filipina/o American identities and communities. The social, cultural and political institutions that have influenced Filipina/o immigration, participatory citizenship, activism and cultural practices. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 340. Cultural Production and Ethnicity. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area C
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area C4
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area C. Recommended: Completion of an Ethnic Studies (ES) course.

Culture and ethnicity as key factors in the production, perception, and interpretation of art and the humanities. Critical analysis of cultural attitudes and knowledge in expressive arts and cultural production, and of the contexts of cultural production as reflective of ethnicity. The Class Schedule will list topic selected. Total credit limited to 12 units. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division C (GE Area C4 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs).

ES 345. Queer Ethnic Studies. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
USCP
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D.

Theories, research and methods focused on the interlocking systems of sexuality, race, racialization, and ethnicity in local, national and comparative global/transnational contexts. Relationships between racialization and heteronormativity, queer of color critique; queer migration; decolonizing queer organizing, theory, and knowledge production. 4 lectures. Crosslisted as ES/WGS 345. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 350. Gender, Race, Culture, Science and Technology. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area B
2019-20 catalog: GE Area B7
2017-19 or earlier catalog: GE Area F
USCP
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; and completion of GE Areas B1 through B4, with a grade of C- or better in one course in GE Area B4 (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs).

Interdisciplinary examination of the complex relationships between gender, race, culture, science, technology in educational, work, knowledge production, policy, and ethical contexts. Topics may include reproductive, medical, genetic, and emerging technologies and exploration of efforts to create more socially responsible science/technology. 3 lectures, 1 activity. Crosslisted as ES 350/HNRS 353/WGS 350. Fulfills GE Upper-Division B (GE Area B7 for students on the 2019-20 catalog; GE Area F for students on earlier catalogs); and USCP.
ES 351. Gender, Race, Class, Nation in Global Engineering, Technology & International Development. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D.

Cross-cultural exploration of the intersections of gender, race, class, nation in the global engineering workforce, small- and large-scale technological systems, and international development programs; special attention to 21st century challenges and efforts to create more socially responsible engineering and technology. 4 lectures. Crosslisted as ES/USCP.

ES 380. Critical Race Theory. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D.

History and evolution of the critical race theory movement. Defining issues of the field; in particular, the relationship between race, power and the law. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 381. The Social Construction of Whiteness. 4 units
2020-21 or later: Upper-Div GE Area D
2019-20 or earlier catalog: GE Area D5
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; one course in GE Area B4 with a grade of C- or better (GE Area B1 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and one lower-division course in GE Area D.

The investigation of the social construction of race in the United States through historicizing the category of ‘whiteness.’ Why ‘white’ was invented as a racial category and how white privilege has been sustained through social, political, economic and legal practices. 4 lectures. Fulfills GE Upper-Division D (GE Area D5 for students on the 2019-20 or earlier catalogs); and USCP.

ES 390. Research Methodology in Comparative Ethnic Studies. 4 units
Prerequisite: Junior standing; completion of GE Area A with grades of C- or better; STAT 217; ES 112; and three courses from ES 241, ES 242, ES 243, ES 244.

Theory and practice of research methodology in comparative ethnic studies. Topics include the scientific method, qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and ethical practices. Research report prepared from start to finish, including database searching, collecting pilot data, and proper formatting of a research report. Issues of race in research practice and use foregrounded throughout. 3 lectures, 1 activity.

ES 400. Special Problems for Advanced Undergraduates. 1-4 units
Prerequisite: Junior standing and consent of department chair.

Individual investigation, research, studies or surveys of selected problems. Total credit limited to 4 units.

ES 406. Indigenous Peoples and International Law and Policy. 4 units
Prerequisite: ES 241; and NR 141 or NR 142; and junior standing required.

Interdisciplinary examination of the evolution of international law effecting indigenous peoples in the U.S. and in the Americas. Development of international legal and sociological norms and their impact on human rights of indigenous peoples with particular attention to environmental issues. 4 lectures. Crosslisted as ES/NR 406.

ES 410. Advanced Topics in Comparative Ethnic Studies. 4 units
Prerequisite: ES 390.

Selected topics and issues in comparative ethnic studies. The Class Schedule will list topic selected. Repeatable for a maximum of 8 units. 4 seminars.

ES 450. Fieldwork in Comparative Ethnic Studies. 4 units
Prerequisite: ES 390.

Supervised project based on fieldwork in comparative ethnic studies. 4 seminars.

ES 461. Senior Project. 4 units
Prerequisite: ES 390 and departmental approval.

Completion of a project under faculty supervision. Results presented in a formal paper or project.

ES 470. Selected Advanced Topics. 1-4 units
Prerequisite: At least one course in Ethnic Studies and consent of instructor.

Directed group study of selected topics for advanced students. The Class Schedule will list topic selected. Total credit limited to 8 units. 1-4 lectures.