



**Harvard College**  
**Program in General Education**  
Explore. Expand. Engage.

## Course Descriptions in Gen Ed

Among the priorities for Harvard's renewed Program in General Education is encouraging academic exploration among our students by inviting them into new areas of inquiry; course descriptions are a part of that work. Therefore, the Program suggests that Gen Ed course descriptions do the following:

- Limit length to 150 to 250 words;
- Speak directly to students using the second person;
- Engage students with thought-provoking questions or concepts;
- Share the guiding questions, context(s) and/or perspectives engaged in the course;
- Provide students with goals or takeaways, telling them what they will learn;
- Offer sample readings and/or types of assignments students may expect; and
- Serve the goals of Gen Ed by explicitly connecting the course material to the world.

Below, we have annotated a course description that utilizes these standards and models the kind of descriptions desired for the new Gen Ed. If you have any questions about finalizing your description, please feel free to reach out to [gened@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:gened@fas.harvard.edu). We're happy to help.

### **GENED 1014: Ancestry**

**Maya Jasanoff**

*216 words*

Everyone comes from somewhere.<sup>1</sup> We carry our ancestries in our DNA, genealogy, family stories, and more. What do these forms of evidence tell us about who we are, as a species, as a social group, or as an individual?<sup>2</sup> This course looks at ancestry from a range of perspectives: biology, anthropology, genealogy, history, law, and memory—from the origins of human populations to the origins of you. Departing from two central assumptions—that the study of ancestry is the study of identity, as well as it is the study of evidence—you will broaden your understanding of ancestry to include different kinds of data, ranging from biological to archival, asking what stories these data tell, and what questions they do and do not answer.<sup>3</sup> You will leave this course better primed to uncover implicit assumptions in qualitative and quantitative data alike: to recognize omissions and limits, to identify subjectivities, and thus be better able to assess a claim's value and scope.<sup>4</sup> Beyond the acquisition of these historico-analytical skills, this course will prepare you to destabilize and reconsider your ideas about ancestry outside of the classroom, extending the work of a single semester into a lifetime of research and inquiry into the implications of ancestry as a form of history and field of individual and collective study.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is the hook that draws students in. It's catchy and brief.

<sup>2</sup> This engages the audience and points to ways in which the course will explore the question.

<sup>3</sup> This lays out the course plan and perspective.

<sup>4</sup> This highlights students' takeaways and speaks directly to them.

<sup>5</sup> This connects the course to the world - a major goal of Gen Ed.