Texas A&M University

Core Curriculum

Initial Request for a Course Addition to the Fall 2014 Core Curriculum

Foundational Component Area: Social and Behavioral Sciences

In the box below, describe how this course meets the Foundational Component Area description for Social and Behavioral Sciences. Courses in this category focus on the application of empirical and scientific methods that contribute to the understanding of what makes us human. Courses involve the exploration of behavior and interactions among individuals, groups, institutions, and events, examining their impact on the individual, society, and culture.

The proposed course must contain all elements of the Foundational Component Area. How does the proposed course specifically address the Foundational Component Area definition above?

ALEC 450 - Global Social Justice Issues in Agriculture provides students with a forum to analyze local and global social justice issues that affect, and are affected by U.S.-based cultural beliefs and consumerism; students engage in data analyses, critical thinking, and intercultural competency building exercises to advance their communication and social responsibility skills. ALEC 450 requires students to develop global and culturally-sensitive perspectives through examination of two central questions: (1) what social justice issues exist in agriculture, and (2) how do U.S. tastes, preferences, and consumer demands promote social injustices in non-U.S. agricultural settings?

ALEC 450 is built on the combination of critical thinking, communication (verbal and written), and research skills to advance students' logical analyses and social responsibility cognizance. Examination and application of intercultural views provides a foundation for weekly discourse on civic responsibilities to the state, nation, and world.

Core Objectives

Describe how the proposed course develops the required core objectives below by indicating how each learning objective will be addressed, what specific strategies will be used for each objective and how student learning of each objective will be evaluated.

The proposed course is required to contain each element of the Core Objective.

Critical Thinking (to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information):

ALEC 450 enhances students' critical thinking skills through collection, use, evaluation, and application of empirical data from the USDA-ERS, World Bank, UNFAO, etc., to establish knowledge about country-specific facts on hunger, poverty, trade, human rights, and agricultural production. These data (e.g., cocoa production in Ghana) are coupled with current global social justice issues (e.g., effects of chocolate consumption in the U.S. on child slavery in Africa) to produce individual and group written and verbal communications' products. Of particular note, is the emphasis placed on four Critical Thinking Skills core areas, known as 1) Evaluating information; 2) Evaluating ideas and other points of view; 3) Learning and problem solving; and 4) Communicating ideas effectively.

Critical Thinking Skills are practiced and assessed through multiple strategies including Critical Thinking Skills Activities (strengthen students' abilities to assess information, identify problems, pose solutions, and communicate results), writing a Position Paper (gather factual information, evaluate and synthesize themes, apply scientific research methods, and communicate findings effectively), and In-class Debate (assess scarce resource simulation and make life choices in the Hungry Decisions case study).
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Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

ALEC 450 enhances students' communication skills through Student-led Discussions (each student leads class discussion for 15 minutes. Student leaders provide visual aids and supplemental information to relevant current topics), Intercultural Exercises (students participate in the Hunger Banquet and Physical/Health Challenge simulations), writing an Analytical Paper (react to instructor prompt on global social justice issue; collect and judge value of science-based information; develop tenable solutions; conduct self- and peer-reviews of writing quality; and prepare final drafts using reviewers' comments), and Presentations (Analytical Papers are presented with visuals, learning activities, and are judged for most likely successful solution to overcome the social justice issue).

Empirical and Quantitative Skills (to include the manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions):

ALEC 450 enhances students' empirical and quantitative skills through access and application of data provided by USDA-ERS, USAID, CIA, UNFAO, Freedom House, and the MDG Monitor. For example, students are presented Gapminder data on longevity and the HDI (Human Development Index). They are challenged to: 1) summarize patterns of results in graphs without making inappropriate inferences; 2) evaluate how strongly correlational-type data supports a hypothesis; 3) provide alternative explanations for patterns of results that have many possible causes; 4) provide relevant alternative interpretations for specific sets of results; and, 5) use basic mathematical skills to help solve a real-world problem. Students analyze data, record their findings, report their conclusions, and convince their peers about the implications of their conclusions.

Social Responsibility (to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities):

ALEC 450 enhances students' social responsibility through the study of Bennett's Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and course assignments (in-class and community-based). Students examine social justice issues such as hunger, poverty, and classism in their local community, relate those issues to cultural values and beliefs systems, and transfer that knowledge to an examination of global social justice issues in agriculture. Students develop new perspectives about their civic responsibilities to improving their local and global communities through educated decision making skills. Those skills are enhanced when students: 1) separate relevant from irrelevant information when solving a real-world problem; 2) use and apply relevant information to evaluate problems; 3) identify suitable solutions for real-world problems using relevant information; 4) identify and explain best solutions for real-world problems using relevant information; and, 5) explain how changes in real-world situations might affect solutions.

Please be aware that instructors should be prepared to submit samples/examples of student work as part of the future course recertification process.