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?

ANTH 201, Introduction to Anthropology, is an existing course being proposed to be continued in the Social and Behavioral Sciences area of the TAMU Core Curriculum. This course examines anthropology as the holistic study of humankind. It provides students a survey of the four fields of anthropology: biological anthropology, archaeology, cultural anthropology, and linguistic anthropology. Three broad themes cross-cut these fields: evolution, culture, and diversity. While modern humans consist of a single biological species, their culture and biology varies across the globe. Students learn what makes us "human," the combination of our shared common ancestry as well as the diverse cultural backgrounds that have emerged only within the past 15-10 millennia. The course covers empirical and scientific methods and theories used in the anthropologies as well as theoretical perspectives and knowledge borrowed from other social and behavioral sciences, and it calls upon scientific methods to explore and explain human behaviors (e.g., technologies, subsistence practices, land-use strategies, trade and exchange networks, symbols and belief systems, and gender roles) of the past and today. ANTH 201 gives students an appreciation for the complex web of behaviors and interactions among individuals, groups, institutions and events and further examines how these behaviors and interactions have impacted the individual, society, and culture. After completing this course, students have a well-rounded knowledge of humanity and human cultures both through time and across space. Lectures, readings and assignments are relevant, covering topics and problems faced by anthropologists today.

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):

In ANTH 201 students are required to examine problem-oriented topics in the four fields of anthropology. Every topic raised in readings and lectures is presented as a problem to be solved in which data and multiple interpretations of these data are discussed. Students must grapple with complex questions like “how do we know when humans first emerged,” instead of simply “when did humans first emerge” to “how and why do different cultural groups stigmatize disability” instead of just “when and where has disability been stigmatized among today’s human populations.” “How” and “why” questions typically reflect informed interpretations of evidence so students in class are repeatedly exposed to alternative theories and perspectives, instead of just observations and facts. Through the course students must learn to analyze, evaluate and synthesize new information, as well as critically evaluate interpretations and theories based on that information.
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Beyond being challenged to think critically during class lectures and discussions, students’ critical thinking skills are evaluated in two meaningful ways.

1) Written exams have essay questions that require students to defend a thesis by critically evaluating anthropological evidence, and diagram interpretation sections of exams require students to evaluate and synthesize the information provided in the associated chart, table, graph or map.

2) Article reviews challenge students to think outside the normal undergraduate box because students are given the opportunity to provide a “peer-review-style” critique of a professional scientific article. Students have to evaluate the work of others by identifying strengths and weaknesses of each article and the articles’ contributions to the discipline of anthropology and field of study it is more specifically in (e.g. biological anthropology, archaeology, cultural anthropology or linguistic anthropology or combination of these).

Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

Through course texts and lectures, students taking ANTH 201 learn to effectively describe and express anthropological information by using accurate and technical vocabulary appropriate to the topic. Students are evaluated on their communication skills on exams, written assignments, and in class discussions.

1) Students learn methods of visual communication, analysis and interpretation by working with various graphic representations of anthropological data, including learning how to assess charts and graphs, tables, maps and other diagrams.

2) Students learn methods of written communication by comparing anthropological data with selections of contemporary publications to interpret human behavior and its relationship to societal and cultural traditions and norms.

3) Students engage in oral communication by formulating accurate and suitable questions and responses during lectures and class discussions. The course lectures are interactive to encourage students to actively participate.

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

In this course students are exposed to specific research samples and case studies in lectures and the textbook. These examples demonstrate to students how manipulation and analysis of anthropological data can help us understand past human behaviors. Various types of anthropological data (e.g., morpho-metric traits, mtDNA haplogroups, stone tools, pottery, kinship, calories, morphemes, phonemes, cognates etc.) are presented, analyzed, and interpreted showing students how to use these data to characterize various human behaviors such as levels of mobility, organization of technologies, subsistence practices, ancestry, language transmission, etc.

Students are also given opportunities to use these newly learned methods in three ways.

1) On exams students are given the opportunity to analyze and interpret data-rich graphs, tables, diagrams and charts. In essay questions, they are also asked to define and discuss anthropological evidence and critique that evidence.

2) In article reviews, students are expected to comment in meaningful ways on the data presented in scientific articles. Students are also asked to give insightful suggestions on how one could more effectively represent the data under consideration.

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

Social responsibility is an important part of being an anthropologist. Anthropologists have an ethical responsibility of championing intercultural competency, spreading knowledge of civic responsibility, and engaging effectively in regional, national, and global communities. Our goals are to educate people (and our students) about the rich diversity
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of humanity, why difference is not something to fear but something to embrace, and the benefits of living and working in a highly diverse community. Through readings, lectures, and assignments students of ANTH 201 are instilled with these values and expected to come away from this course with a sense of and appreciation for social responsibility. Below are several ways in which students learn about these values and are evaluated on their sense of social responsibility.

1) Course content repeatedly demonstrates humanity’s deep past (>3 million years) and rich diversity of global cultural traditions that exist today, thereby instilling a sense of intercultural competency and sensitivity to other ways of doing, thinking, and being.

2) Through lectures, readings, and assignments, students encounter the potential social and political power of anthropological and archaeological evidence, learning that many human societies use (and have used) anthropology to create a sense of ethnicity and nationalism, or to downplay another society’s claims to lands, resources, and traditions. Students walk away from this course with a sense of cultural sensitivity towards other peoples and cultures.

3) Lectures, readings, and assignments demonstrate how anthropology has evidenced the origins of the world’s major cultural traditions, providing students a means of becoming effective, educated members of a global community. This is especially important since the state and nation in which they live are increasingly becoming more and more diverse. Students leave ANTH 201 with a greater respect for other lifeways.

4) Student performance on exams and exercises is used as a proxy to gauge their knowledge of the world’s varied cultural traditions and emerging ability to function in a multi-cultural world.

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