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 202, Introduction to Archaeology, is an existing Texas A&M Core Curriculum course in Humanities. It is being proposed here for inclusions in the Social and Behavioral Sciences area of the Core Curriculum. This course examines the social and behavioral scientific field of archaeology. It provides students a survey of the fundamentals of archaeological practice by covering the empirical and scientific methods and theory used in archaeology as well as how archaeology is informed by theories and knowledge from other social and behavioral sciences. The course also provides an overview of the archaeological record from our beginnings to recent times, specifically considering past human behaviors such as technologies, subsistence practices, land-use strategies, trade and exchange networks, symbols and belief systems, and gender roles to name several. ANTH 202 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 past human cultures through time and across space. Lectures, readings and assignments are relevant, covering topics and problems faced by archaeologists 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 202 students are required to examine problem-oriented topics in the field of archaeology. 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 and why did humans first domesticate plants and animals,” instead of simply “when and where did humans first domesticate plants and animals”. “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.

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 archaeological evidence, and diagram interpretation sections of exams require students to evaluate and
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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 journal article. Students have to evaluate the work of others by identifying strengths and weaknesses of each article and the articles’ contributions to the field of archaeology.

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

Through course texts and lectures, students taking ANTH 202 learn to effectively describe and express archaeological 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 archaeological data, including learning how to assess charts and graphs, tables, maps and other diagrams.

2) Students learn methods of written communication by comparing archaeological data with selections of contemporary publications to interpret past 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 archaeological data can help us understand past human behaviors. Archaeological data (e.g., radiocarbon, optically stimulated luminescence and other forms of numerical dates, stone tool data, faunal and floral data, architectural data, spatial data, etc.) are presented, analyzed, and interpreted, showing students how to use these data to reconstruct timing of archaeological events and various human behaviors such as organization of technology, subsistence practices, settlement strategies, and ceremonial activities to name a few.

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.

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.

3) Exercises challenge students to collect their own data and use these data to better understand past human behaviors. For example, a seriation exercise asks students to collect tombstone data from a local cemetery and develop a chronology of the interments in that cemetery.

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 archaeologist, specifically an anthropological archaeologist. Archaeologists have the ethical responsibility of championing intercultural competency, spreading knowledge of civic responsibility, and engaging effectively in regional, national, and global communities with regards to education of humanity’s past and the preservation of that past. Through readings, lectures, and assignments (article reviews and exercises) students of ANTH 202 are instilled with these values and expected to come away from this course with a
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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 have emerged over the past 20,000-10,000 years, thereby instilling a sense of intercultural competency and sensitivity to other ways of doing, thinking, and being that can be felt on local, regional, national and global scales.

2) Through lectures, readings, and assignments, students encounter the potential social and political power of archaeological evidence and archaeological objects, learning that many human societies (and in some cases, archaeologists) use (and have used) archaeology to create a sense of ethnicity and nationalism, or to downplay another society’s claims of lands, resources, and even their past. Students learn that it is their civic responsibility as members of society to determine whether archaeological and historic monuments should be protected, and whether artifacts and objects of cultural patrimony should be possessed by individuals or society at large.

3) Lectures, readings, and assignments demonstrate how archaeology 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 202 with a greater respect of other peoples and cultures.

4) Student performance on exams and exercises is used as a proxy of 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.