Texas A&M University

Core Curriculum

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

Foundational Component Area: Language, Philosophy and Culture

In the box below, describe how this course meets the Foundational Component Area description for Language, Philosophy and Culture. Courses in this category focus on how ideas, values, beliefs, and other aspects of culture express and affect human experience. Courses involve the exploration of ideas that foster aesthetic and intellectual creation in order to understand the human condition across cultures.

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 205, Peoples and Cultures of the World, is an existing Texas A&M Core Curriculum course in Humanities. It is being proposed for inclusion in the Language, Philosophy and Culture area of the new TAMU Core Curriculum. In this course, students learn what “Culture” is through the lens of anthropology and gain an appreciation for the rich fabric of humanity. It provides an introduction to ethnographic inquiry and a survey of the peoples of the world. This course examines the numerous dimensions by which human cultures vary, including a detailed look at economy and subsistence, family formation, religion, language, political structure, gender roles and relationships, and many more. Students uncover a number of different populations around the world, learning their unique customs and ways of life. Additionally, students explore current impacts of colonization and globalization on Earth’s peoples. This course instills an understanding of the amazing variation of the human condition and ability to reflect upon their own culture in relation to regional, national and global contexts. Students leave this course with a cultural awareness that can and should inform future evaluations of domestic and global issues. Through this cross-cultural experience, students learn to appreciate the diversity of the human condition, learning that “their way” of doing, interacting, and thinking is neither the only way nor the best way.

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):

Although this is primarily a lecture course, its content is organized to introduce students to questions and issues related to the different peoples and their cultures. As such, students are forced to grapple with complex questions like “how do different cultural groups deal with aggression”, instead of just “which cultures are more aggressive than others”; or “how and why do some cultures practice pastoralism”, instead of just “which cultures practice pastoralism”. Since these “how” and “why” questions in anthropology typically reflect informed interpretations of evidence, students are repeatedly exposed to alternative theories and perspectives on these problems, instead of just general observations and facts. This means, then, that through the course students must learn to analyze, evaluate and synthesize new information, as well as to critically evaluate interpretations and theories based on that information.

Students’ critical-thinking skills will be evaluated in three ways. First, written exams have essay questions that require students to defend a thesis by critically evaluating anthropological information (e.g., “The two-spirit people or ‘Berdaches’ in Native American cultures always consider themselves transgendered” or “By western standards, Yanomami people are violent”). Second, students write two critical essays—in the example syllabus attached to this
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The proposal one asks students to consider whether gender is biologically or socially driven, and the other asks students to consider ways in which societies have been affected by colonialism. Third, over the course of the semester four problem-solving impromptu quizzes require students to come to class well-read so they can actively engage in lecture and be prepared to creatively and innovatively evaluate and synthesize that day’s topic in an impromptu fashion.

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

In this course, students are challenged to practice all three forms of communication, written, oral, and visual. Each exam requires students to respond with written, argumentative essays that defend a thesis. Likewise, written assignments offer students the opportunity to conduct library research, create an argument, and write an essay that defends a thesis. Students learn to follow a style guide, properly cite other works, and paraphrase accurately and correctly. Further, the impromptu quizzes afford students the opportunity to effectively express their interpretations of the day’s reading and lecture topic. These quizzes are given in class and during a limited time (10-15 minutes) so students have to come to class prepared to efficiently express their ideas.

In a large lecture class, providing students with the opportunity to practice oral communication skills is difficult to accomplish; however, in this class it is done by creating an interactive lecture environment in which students are encouraged to ask questions, answer questions, and comment on topics being presented in class. On some days during the semester, students will be given the opportunity to break out into small groups to discuss the day’s topic. Obviously, in a class this size it is impossible to evaluate each student’s individual development in oral-communication skills, so that the only way that they can be evaluated is through class attendance, emphasizing days during which small-group discussions are held.

Visual communication skills are developed in this course through lectures. Frequently during lectures and reading assignments, students encounter videos, pictures, charts, and maps expressing or summarizing anthropological observations and evidence. As an observational field, the practice of anthropology is very much visually oriented. Through these experiences, students learn how to interpret such visuals, and on exams they are tested by responding to questions that relate to visual representations similar to those discussed in class.

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 cross-cultural knowledge and 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 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 205 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 rich diversity through cross-cultural comparisons of today’s cultures, 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 information, 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, however, with a sense of cultural sensitivity towards other peoples and cultures.
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3) Lectures, readings, and assignments demonstrate how anthropology informs on the value of the diversity seen in today's peoples and cultures of the world, 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 205 with a greater respect for other lifeways.

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

Personal Responsibility (to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making):

The two writing assignments in this course require students to consider how to ethically use sources to craft a persuasive argument/answer to an anthropological problem. In the sample syllabus that accompanies this proposal, two ethical issues in anthropological are used as the problems to tackle in these writing assignments. First, they write an essay on the long-term affects of colonialism on human societies, in which they consider the ways in which the economics and politics have affected native peoples' access to land and other resources that were traditionally theirs. Second, they write an essay on the cultural perceptions of gender, in which they consider how culture affects ways we think about gender and interact with members of differing and same genders. Both of these writing assignments are designed to introduce students to ethical choices people make. Student learning of personal responsibility and ethical decision-making is accomplished through evaluation of content of these two written essays.

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