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 210, Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology, is an existing Texas A&M Core Curriculum course in Social and Behavioral Sciences. It is being proposed for inclusion in the Language, Philosophy and Culture area of the new TAMU Core Curriculum. This course will provide students with an introduction to the fields of social and cultural anthropology. Social and cultural differences make life as a human being both interesting and intimidating. On the one hand, culture is something that can unite people (e.g., same language, values, religion, politics, hobbies, interpretations of acceptable gender roles, etc.). On the other hand, culture can divide peoples because of differences in this aspects of culture. This course examines the numerous dimensions by which human cultures vary. We will also explore different theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain how and why cultures vary the way they do along these dimensions around the world. After completing this course, students will leave with an understanding of the major concepts and methods of cultural anthropology. They will gain an appreciation for the amazing variation of the human condition and learn how to explain why such variation exists. This knowledge will provide a cultural awareness that can inform future evaluations of regional and global issues. Students learn to appreciate the diversity of human culture and come to realize 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 cultural diversity. As such, students are forced to grapple with complex questions such as "how and why do members of different cultural groups practice the same religion", instead of just "which cultural groups practice the same religion". Since "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. Second, every day students are asked a quiz question that makes them think critically before answering. These questions come from reading and lecture materials and challenge students worldview, getting them to think outside the box of middle America. Third, lectures and class discussions constantly challenge students to think beyond their own cultural awareness.
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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, in homework assignments students are asked to conduct research, create an argument, and write an essay again that defends a thesis. With these homework exercises, students learn to accurately reflect the cultural practices of others. Further, daily quizzes afford students the opportunity to effectively express their interpretations of the day’s reading and lecture topics.

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 210 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) Cultural anthropology demonstrates humanity’s rich diversity through cross-cultural studies of human cultures. In this course, students are taught intercultural competence and civic responsibility.

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.

3) Lectures, readings, and assignments demonstrate how anthropology informs on the value of human cultural diversity, 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 210 with a greater respect for other lifeways.

4) Student performance on exams and homework 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.
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Personal Responsibility (to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making):

The three homework assignments in this course require students to collect anthropological observations and data, evaluate these observations and data and share these data in an ethically responsible way that is meaningful and respectful of the cultural beings represented. These exercises show students how to take personal responsibility for their decisions. Further, through participating in class discussions students are held responsible for the decisions they make when contributing to discussion. Their questions and responses to questions need to be respectful of all others in class, regardless if they agree or disagree with them.

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