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 317, Introduction to Biblical Archaeology, which has been taught almost annually since 1991, is proposed for inclusion in the Language, Philosophy and Culture Foundational Component Area of Texas A&M University’s (TAMU) Core Curriculum. This course instills in the student an appreciation for the complexity and diversity of the cultures that peopled the Levant in biblical times. Students discover the rich tapestry of ethnic groups that form the milieu of the Bible and inform its narrative. The course begins with an in-depth introduction to the methodologies and the tools employed in archaeological research in general, and more specifically in the archaeology of biblical lands (i.e. tells/tells, which are mounds of settlements, one atop the other). This begins with the basics, thus placing all students—irrespective of their backgrounds—on common ground. Following this, the course takes the student on a guided tour of the peoples and lands that form the Biblical matrix, beginning with the Neolithic agricultural revolution down to the first century AD. In each of these units the students learns about the ethnic groups as seen through their unique material cultures, while exploring how this evidence reflects the complexity of the various populations. When applicable both Biblical and extra-Biblical texts sources, as well as contemporaneous iconography are also considered. During the semester the student is introduced to a panoply of peoples: Sumerians, Canaanites, Mycenaean (Bronze Age) Greeks, Israelites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Romans and others. In each case the students learns about the imprint and significance of these ethnic groups.

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 ANTH 317 is essentially a lecture course, each unit requires the student to grapple with interpreting evidence. Thus, by its nature, the course is a critical inquiry into the relevant source materials. While the course focuses on the archaeological evidence, it is also informed by textual evidence as well as iconography: Each of these sources must be analyzed: The course fully emphasizes the complexity of issues, and presents alternate views and interpretations. One example—of many—is the discussion regarding to when to assign the period of the Patriarchs as described in Genesis. This analysis requires the student to address issues such as the price of slaves and the comparison of treaties and covenants as they appear in the Bible versus those appearing in contemporaneous extra-biblical economic documents. Throughout the semester the student is repeatedly required to investigate, evaluate and synthesize these data, as well as critically assessing theories and
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interpretations based on the presented materials.

One assignment and three tests measure the student’s progress. The assignment requires the creation of a tel (ancient mound) and a section through it. To do this the student must think creatively, as the tel can be a real one, or one that s/he must create of their choosing (“Tel Aggie” is a perennial favorite) and discuss within this scenario stratigraphic problems that might confuse the site’s levels during an excavation. The 200-level Honors version of the course also requires that the student write a critical term paper.

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

ANTH 317 Introduction to Biblical Archaeology is a lecture class. As archaeology is a visual discipline, the course is based primarily on slide lectures given in Keynote®, the Apple version of Powerpoint. These lectures develop the student's visual communication and comprehension skills. The slides are short on text and long on visual prompts that challenge the student to see and, more importantly, to understand topics at a deeper level. The student is introduced both during the lectures, as well as in course readings, to artifacts, maps, chronologies and charts that synthesize archaeological or historical data.

The lectures are posted online in the Electronic Course Reserves: at the beginning of the semester the students are instructed to download and print out the lectures, or to mark them up on their digital devices, so that they have a visual record as an aid to learning the materials covered in class and to preparing for tests.

Sessions are dedicated to two instructional programs: “Archaeology from the Ground Down,” a Biblical Archaeology Society production, which summarizes methodologies and issues of Biblical Archaeology, and the award-winning NOVA Program, “Voyage to Antiquity,” which tells the story of the discovery, excavation and research on the 3,300-year-old Uluburun shipwreck, the oldest known coherent shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea. There is also one visiting lecture, dealing with the impact of the Neolithic agriculture revolution and how this effects our eating habits and health today.

Class participation accustoms the student to understanding and evaluating images and data sets critically. During the semester these different types of information—archaeology, texts and iconography—are compared to facilitate comprehensive understanding of lecture topics. For example, the study of repose decoration on a small silver chalice, the “4,000-year-old Ayn Samya Goblet discovered north of Jerusalem, reveals that it represents part of the Mesopotamian creation myth (the enuma elish). Interpreting this single artifact requires A) combining two forms of evidence and B) a realization of the flow and ebb of cultural connectivity in the ancient Near East.

Obviously, the ability to engage the student in oral communication is largely inversely proportional to the size of the class. Nevertheless the course, irrespective of class enrollment, is carried out in an interactive environment in which the student is constantly encouraged to take part in discussions and questions framed by the curriculum.

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

The materials covered in this course aims to strengthen the student in each of these three aspects of social interaction. As the course is grounded in the land and period of the Bible, by definition it supplies each student with a basic background to the milieu that led to the actual foundations of the Judeo-Christian ethic, which serves as a prime base for all Western civilization. The student’s growing awareness of this setting contributes to her/his knowledge of civic responsibility in times past and promotes engagement on local, national and international levels. Awareness of the great variety of ancient cultures covered in the course nurtures greater cultural sensitivity: A byproduct of this is a better understanding of local ethnic diversity.
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Discussions on problems related to antiquity theft lead to civic issues of site and artifact protection as a civic duty on a personal, national and global scales. Questions regarding the private versus the communal ownership of artifacts, the movement of artifacts between countries and issues of repatriation raise awareness to the complexities of archaeological patrimony. During the course the student addresses issues that speak to cultural traditions, thus aiding them to see their own place within the local and global society.

Social responsibility may be difficult to evaluate in the classroom. Despite this, tests can evaluate the student’s widening awareness to the rich fabric of past human diversity, as one of the main foci of the course is the interplay among ancient Near Eastern cultures.

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

The deep association of this course with the roots of biblical society, which is at the very heart of modern ethics as understood in Western Culture, gives the student a solid grounding in its background. From Patriarchs to prophets, the student is introduced to the actual world in which these ideas were first manifest.

Additionally, from the first meeting this course treats the student as an adult. The primary rule of adulthood states that a person must take responsibility for her/his own actions. The course stresses the responsibility of the individual student, beginning with class attendance, focus during class and culminating with preparation for tests.

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