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?

In keeping with the vision of the INTS Department to provide “a curriculum that captures the broad range of social, political, cultural, and economic forces at play in an increasingly interdependent world”, ARAB 201 uses the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century as a framework to design and organize its language and culture content. More specifically, this first intermediate language course enables students to:

1. communicate in Arabic through face-to-face interaction, interpreting written and spoken messages on a variety of topics, and presenting information verbally and in writing in ways that are culturally appropriate and linguistically accurate.
2. gain cross-cultural skills by learning about cultural products, perspectives and practices found in Arabic-speaking countries, and by identifying areas of similarities and differences between the target culture and their own culture.
3. go beyond language learning by enriching and expanding their knowledge about the Arabic literature, art, geography and history.
4. become more productive and accountable through collaboration by completing class activities and projects and presenting them to the class in a timely fashion.
5. develop the desire and the ability to use language and culture skills beyond the school setting through study abroad programs in Arabic-speaking countries in ways that will contribute to their personal and intercultural growth and open up career opportunities for them.

Materials covered in the course include a variety of written texts, audio samples, selected video segments about current events in the Arab world, and other works that enhance students’ appreciation of artistic works, cultural and historical traditions, and social values and beliefs. Studying these materials in Arabic not only helps students to gain a deep appreciation of other cultures, but also leads them to reflect on their own cultural experience and to be attentive to communication in their primary language.

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):

The text used in this course, Al-Kitaab, evolves around the story of several Egyptian characters (high school and college students who are males and females) as they describe, directly and indirectly, their interests, emotions, ambitions, likes and dislikes, life challenges, among others. The course enhances critical thinking by allowing the students, as they listen to and read about these characters in Arabic, to understand and reflect upon different points of view held by the characters, the social, political and economic context and constraints that are shaping their feelings, attitudes,
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decisions and behaviors. As they engage in class discussion, reading activities and written assignments, students get a chance to critically reflect on the life of young men and women in Egypt and to compare the lives of these young college students with their own. Through their final projects and power point presentations at the end of the course, students also get a chance to learn more about different Arab countries and dispel stereotypes they might have about these countries.

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

The textbook used in the course comes with a DVD and a companion website, allowing the students to listen to and read about the characters as they talk about different aspects of their lives. To ensure comprehension, students get to discuss and write about what they watch and read about both in groups and individually. Linguistic and cultural information gained from the reading and listening materials are assessed in different ways (multiple choice, true/false, open-ended questions). Students also use graphic organizers to capture different aspects of the characters’ lives and how they relate to each others. Finally students react to what they see and read by giving physical and personal descriptions of the different characters through written assignments (short paragraphs).

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

As they listen to and read about the different characters, students are invited to identify areas of commonalities and differences with the Egyptian youth. They learn to suspend judgements and demonstrate empathy with the characters and understand the broader context (economic and social) that affect people’s views and practices in ways that help them to better communicate with Arabic-speaking people in the future. By learning about the economic and social conditions of the characters, students also get to understand what’s driving people’s quest for migration in search of a better life, what’s leading to population movements with great cultural and linguistic implications. This is depicted when describing the desire of some characters in the story to work in Dubai in order to fulfill their dreams. The course goes beyond the textbook and provides students with selected video segments dealing with a variety of topics in Arabic-speaking countries, including forms of entertainment, likes and dislikes of people in order to understand the impact of globalization on the lives of young people everywhere. Class discussion, personal reflections expressed in short paragraphs, power point presentations and regular quizzes are used to ensure students’ development in these areas of social responsibility.

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

The stories covered in this course depict the struggle of the characters as they make important choices and decisions having to do with balancing work and family life, how to preserve family values, whether ailing parents should stay with their children or live in nursing homes, wrestling with the decision to leave one’s home country in search of better economic opportunities and the impact of that decision on family relations. Listening to these stories and discussing the causes and consequences of the characters’ decisions through short written assignments provide the students with an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of some aspects of Egyptian society and to reflect on important issues that they might need to grapple with directly or indirectly in the short and long term, such as study abroad, choosing a career, getting married, joining the army, whether they would prefer to see their parents stay with them or in a nursing home, etc.
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Please be aware that instructors should be prepared to submit samples/examples of student work as part of the future course recertification process.