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 202 uses the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century and the 21st Century Skills as a framework to design and organize its language and cultural content. More specifically, this second intermediate language course seeks to enable students to:

1. use Arabic to communicate more confidently and effectively on a wide range of topics and in a variety of modes: face-to-face interaction, interpreting written and spoken messages in Arabic on a variety of topics, presenting information in manners that are culturally appropriate and linguistically accurate.
2. expand their cross-cultural skills and show flexibility and adaptability by learning more about cultural products, perspectives and practices found in the Arab world, and by identifying areas of similarities and differences between the target culture and their own culture.
3. use language learning as a tool to reinforce and acquire new knowledge about the literature, art, geography and history of the Arab World.
4. become more productive and accountable through collaboration and group work to complete class activities and projects and present them to the class in a timely fashion.
5. develop the mindset and preparedness (linguistically and culturally) to live and study in an Arabic-speaking environment in ways that will contribute to their personal and intercultural growth and open up career opportunities for them.

Materials covered in the course includes a variety of written and electronic, culturally authentic texts, selected video segments about current events in the Arab world, and other authentic materials that enhance students’ appreciation of artistic works, cultural and historical traditions, and social and political values and beliefs. Studying these materials in the original language not only helps students to gain a deep appreciation of foreign 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):

Course materials consist of 13 lessons from Al-Kitaab, and companion website, all of which evolve around the life of several Egyptian characters (males and females) who are college students as they describe in different ways their conditions, interests, feelings, ambitions, life challenges, and their perceptions about America, among others. The course enhances critical thinking by allowing the students, as they listen to and read about these characters in Arabic,
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to understand and reflect upon the points of view of the characters, the social, political and economic context and constraints that shape their feelings, attitudes, decisions and behaviors and their views on American culture. As the students engage in class activities and written assignments, they get a chance to critically reflect on the life of these young men and women in Egypt and to compare it with their own life. Students also get a chance to describe and reflect upon their perceptions about the characters, and Arabic-speaking people in general, and the extent to which what they have learned from the stories reinforces or dispels preconceived ideas about the Arab world. They also describe and discuss, verbally and writing, the stereotypes held by these Egyptians characters about the American culture, such as friendship, family life, etc.

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

The course materials, which include a textbook, DVDs, a companion website and selected video segments from popular Arab media sources (Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya), provide the students with linguistic and cultural content that they can view, discuss, read and write about. Students work individually and in groups to answer questions and show their comprehension of the reading and listening materials and to perform writing tasks and even sing popular songs. Linguistic and cultural information gained from the reading and listening materials is assessed in different ways (multiple choice, true/false, open-ended questions). Students also use graphic organizers and power point presentations to capture different aspects of the characters’ lives and the complex relationships that exist among these characters. Finally students react to what they have learned about the different characters by giving personality descriptions and back them with different information that they gathered from the reading and listening activities.

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

As they read about the different characters in the stories and as they watch different video segments from Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya, students are invited to identify areas of commonalities and differences with the Egyptian youth and life in major Arab cities. They learn to suspend judgments, show empathy and understand the broader economic and social and cultural context that affects people’s views, practices and dreams. By doing so, students become better equipped, linguistically and culturally, to communicate effectively with native speakers of Arabic. Students also learn about popular forms of entertainment, likes and dislikes of the youth and the cultural norms that define forms of entertainment, interpersonal and gender communication. While talking about one of the character’s decision to study in America and stay there after graduation, students get to learn about the economic conditions in Egypt, cultural and linguistic implications of such decisions and the struggle of the first generation to cope with two cultures. Class discussion, personal reflection, 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 contained in the textbook, and the different characters that they depict, embody the struggle of ordinary people as they grapple with important choices and decisions in their lives having to do with immigration in search of better opportunities, grappling with the generation gap especially between immigrant parents and their children, among others. Listening to these stories and discussing the causes and consequences of the characters’ decisions and choices provide the students with an opportunity to reflect on issues that might affect them directly and indirectly in the short and long term, such as study abroad and identity issues, choosing a career that has major implications on family’s stability, choosing a spouse, joining the army, maintaining family relations, among others. In addition to class discussion, students demonstrate their understanding of the characters’ choices and consequences and react to them
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through multiple choice questions, and short written assignments.

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