Texas A&M University
Core Curriculum
Initial Request for a Course Addition to the Fall 2014 Core Curriculum

Foundational Component Area: Social and Behavioral Sciences

In the box below, describe how this course meets the Foundational Component Area description for Social and Behavioral Sciences. Courses in this category focus on the application of empirical and scientific methods that contribute to the understanding of what makes us human. Courses involve the exploration of behavior and interactions among individuals, groups, institutions, and events, examining their impact on the individual, society, and culture.

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?

ARCH 212 – Social and Behavioral Factors in Design examines the social and behavioral factors in environmental design through critical thinking, discussions, and case studies around two questions: (1) how the environment influences people's behaviors and societal outcomes, and (2) how people perceive, use, and adapt to their environment. A variety of built and natural environments will be discussed, ranging from room interiors and buildings to parks, communities, and cities. Human behavior will also be interpreted broadly to include issues such as human performance, social interaction, health, and well-being.

Students will learn theories and knowledge from social and behavioral science and improve their understanding of environment-behavior relationships. At the end of the semester, they are expected to become better designers with people and society in mind. They will also learn to use behavioral observation, survey and other appropriate methods to study environment-behavior relationships.

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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):

Class LECTURES use diverse teaching methods (through videos, simulations, PowerPoint slides, discussion groups, etc.) to demonstrate how critical thinking helps understand social and behavioral factors in design. Class ASSIGNMENTS challenge students to use their own critical thinking to analyze, evaluate and synthesize the information related to specific social and behavior factors. The assignment evaluation uses “critical thinking” as one important criteria.

Following are a few samples of assignments that address critical thinking: (1) "Treasure Hunt for ‘Stupid’ Design," in which students look for the poorest design example in their living environment in terms of addressing social and behavioral factors; (2) "Observe, Document and Analyze Environment-Behavior Relationships," in which students use field observation, behavior mapping and analysis to study personal spaces and social interactions in open spaces on TAMU campus; (3) "Design for Children/Older People," in which students use literature review, case studies to understand the specific environmental needs that children (or older people) may have, and then develop design guidelines to address these needs.
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Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

Class activities include discussions, student presentations, and sketch exercises. Class assignments include components of written, oral and visual communication. Student will be evaluated for not only "critical thinking" but also "effective communication." Following is a more detailed explanation.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION: Class assignments include significant writing components. For example, each student team is required to write a report with about 2000 words for their final project, and other individual or team assignments also require narrative text as part of the final product.

ORAL COMMUNICATION: Students are required to present their work in class individually or in a team. The oral presentation is typically 5-10 minutes long and aided by a PowerPoint file. The student are also asked to share their feedback for presentations given by their peers.

VISUAL COMMUNICATION: Class assignments have a strong focus on visual communication as well. For example, three field exercise assignments require students to submit a poster as the final product. The poster will include photos with annotations, drawings, bar charts, and other visual components.

Empirical and Quantitative Skills (to include the manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions):

CLASS LECTURES use research samples to demonstrate how the manipulation and analysis of numerical data can help understand social and behavioral factors and inform the design process. Here are a few samples of relevant class materials: (1) the video titled "Social Life of the Small Urban Spaces," which documents how the "Street Life" project helped researchers to better understand people’s use of urban spaces and informed the zoning codes in New York City; (2) PowerPoint slides about empirical studies that demonstrate the restorative effect of nature, or how poor design of housing may lead to higher crime rates in cities.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS challenge students to collect numerical data on their own and use those data to better understand environment-behavior relationships. Their ability to collect, understand and analyze numerical data will be evaluated in corresponding assignments. For example, one exercise asked students to document the number and locations of people and types of activities in open spaces on campus, and then use these data to analyze how people’s behavior relate to specific environmental features such as affordances (e.g., seating), prospect/refuge (e.g., tree shade), and traffic.

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 a significant aspect in any environmental design process. Both the lectures and assignments address environmental designers’ responsibility in fostering sustainability of the environment and health and wellbeing of the people living in the environment.

For example, lectures on “Human, Nature, and Architecture” addresses designers’ responsibility in respecting nature and developing sustainable design. Lectures on “Design for Children/Older People” focus on designers’ social responsibility in addressing the environmental needs of these vulnerable populations. Lectures on “Design for Health” examine how environmental design can help improve the health and wellbeing of their clients, or how poor design may actually have negative impacts on human health.

In the assignments, students should be able to demonstrate their understanding of environmental designers'
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social responsibility. For example, in the final project on “Design for Children (or Older People),” students are evaluated for their understanding of two key questions: (1) what kind of environmental needs children (or older people) have, and (2) how the design of built environment can help address such needs.

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