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?

Communication, has both a social-scientific and a humanities tradition. COMM 301 focuses on the humanities tradition. In the humanities, we are interested in the historical roots of human action, ethical aspects of our social practices, and the careful reading of texts. The humanities tradition in Communication is called “rhetorical studies,” and is, along with philosophy, the very oldest of modes of academic inquiry in Western culture. In this course, we discuss the development of rhetorical theory and practice with an emphasis on ancient Greece and Rome. Starting in the second half of the semester, we focus on contemporary rhetorical theory and the intersection of rhetoric and civic life. For example, in an examination of rhetoric and politics, we might use as case studies of rhetorical practice texts from recent presidential elections, bringing in not only the oral and written components of rhetoric, but visual aspects of communication, as well.

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):

Metaphors, narratives, and ideographs are key elements of rhetoric. They frame perception, can be used to alter perceptions and therefore each must be interrogated in order to be evaluated. Students must inquire into the contextual features as they analyze texts in order to evaluate each element with thoroughness. Students are led through the processes that scholars from antiquity to current times have used to elicit new and fresh insights. The synthesis of these many factors leads to creative thinking in the sense that students are asked to view texts from a fresh perspective and to question both convergent and divergent interpretations. The ability to think critically about rhetoric is assessed by student response to standard examination items.

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

Examples of texts/artifacts include: speeches, advertisements, photos, monuments, films, songs, bodies, documentaries, and newspaper articles. Therefore, this wide range of rhetorical acts provides numerous options for studying how others have developed, interpreted and expressed ideas in written, oral and visual communication. Additionally, students gain insight into development, interpretation and expression of their own written, oral and visual rhetorical acts. The ability to communicate effectively and to assess effective communication is assessed by student response to standard examination items.
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Social Responsibility (to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities):

Rhetoric is the action involved in using words, non-verbal communication and visual images to construct social reality. A key concept is the notion of public vocabulary (see Lukács and Condit, for example,) the "culturally established and sanctioned" terms that constitute our presupposed understanding of our shared existence. The examination of these presuppositions is a critical feature of intercultural competence (defined, for example, as "the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes needed to live and work in a diverse world," gvuu.edu) The civic responsibility piece comes into play with the mastery of the concept that, while it may be claimed that rhetoric is neutral, our language choices do not have a neutral effect on others in our shared society. The rhetoric shapes the way people understand themselves individually and in relation to communities, publics and cultures. The way that rhetoric influences the ability to engage in regional, national and global communities extends not simply from the immediate, one time impact of a message, but also from the way people see the world the same or differently for the long-term, after encountering a particular rhetorical act. A rhetorical act has deep social meanings that may vary as a feature of the audience whether it is an ethnic group, a country or an entire culture. People make decisions based on a shared understanding of the public vocabulary and they use rhetoric to bring about social change by managing society's views of the human condition. The ability to reflect critically about rhetoric and social responsibility is assessed by student response to standard examination items.

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

The use of rhetoric is an action and people can be held accountable for the actions they take. While an individual may or may not intend to accomplish a particular purpose with a rhetorical act, they can be held responsible for the act's effects Therefore, individuals must consider the effects of their actions whenever they communicate. Rhetorician Gerald Miller, for example, held that every act of communication is inextricably intertwined with ethics. In the study of rhetoric, ethics refers to the standards of both the procedures and skills used and the outcomes desired by use of a rhetorical act. Therefore, students examine firsthand the stated intentions and contexts that shape the perception and interpretation of meaning for the speaker (or producer) of the text. Additionally, the choice of a particular text, as well as mode for that text, relates back to the ethical frame. Each of these decision-points and choices reflect on the personal responsibility of the speaker (producer) of the text. Competence in articulating the relationship between rhetorical choices and personal responsibility is assessed through student responses to standard examination items.

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