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?

The United States of America began with a rhetorical act. Before “America” was recognized as a sovereign entity, its meaning was expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Affirmations, challenges, and alterations to our conception of national identity and values have, in kind, emerged through numerous public debates and episodes of rhetorical discourse. This class is designed to familiarize students with significant speeches, documents, and rhetorical movements that have shaped our conception of United States culture from colonial times to the present. First and foremost, this course demonstrates the importance of public discourse in the formation, continuation, and mutation of social and political ideas. Language is framed within culture defined by time period and context. Language defines and frames our ‘national philosophy.’ By considering these important texts as relevant to a longer, ongoing conversation, students gain further insight into the diverse political and rhetorical context of American existence, as well as enhance their ability to think critically about the longer history of ideas that have shaped our conceptions of public life.

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 rhetorical acts, which are American oratory, frame perception. Rhetoric can be used to alter perception, and therefore, each speech is interrogated, in order to be evaluated. Students are required to inquire into the contextual features (speaker, message, audience) 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):
Some of the speeches examined, exist today only in written form. However, eyewitness accounts of the original presentation exist in some cases. Archival sources often provide drafts that provide a view of the processes involved in development of the speeches. Speeches delivered after the means to record them existed, have these same archival sources to aid in examination of invention, and feature the means to study development, interpretation and expression of message in written form, oral form and visual form. Visual communication is especially important in analysis of the speaker’s delivery, artifacts and response of the audience to the message. The ability to think critically about communication is assessed by student response to standard examination items.

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

Speeches are made up of rhetoric. Rhetoric is the action involved in using words, non-verbal communication and visual images to construct the social reality, which is the United States of America. A key concept is the notion of public vocabulary (see Lucaites 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.” gvsu.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, in this case hearing a particular speech. A speech has deep social meanings that may have different meanings for different audiences whether the audience is an ethnic group within our country, our country as a whole or a co-culture within the United States. 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 our national 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):

Speaking is an action and people will be held accountable for the actions they take. While an individual may or may not intend to accomplish a particular purpose with a speech in the process of oratory, they can be held responsible for the speech’s effects. Therefore, individuals must consider the effects of their speech whenever they communicate. Rhetorician Gerald Miller, for example, held that every act of communication is inextricably intertwined with ethics. In the study of American Oratory, ethics refers to the standards of the procedures and skills used in oratory, as well as, 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 speech. Additionally, the choice of a particular speech, as well as mode for that speech, relates back to the ethical frame. Each of these decision points and choices reflect on the personal responsibility of the speaker (producer) of the speech. Competence in articulating the relationship between rhetorical choices and personal
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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.