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.

How does the proposed course specifically address the Foundational Component Area definition above?

The primary goal of this course is to introduce the theory and practice of environmental writing through the study of primary texts from both American and Anglophone literature from around the world, using the approach generally known as eco-criticism. Class discussion will focus on readings from primary texts supplemented by samples from the critical literature. The main idea is to arrive at an understanding of the art of environmental politics in two senses: 1. To engage works of art that offer insights into environmental values—mainly literary essays, poems, and stories, but also works in other media, such as journalism, science writing, film, music, photography, television, and even ads and bumper stickers; and 2. to consider environmental politics as an act in itself—art in the way that Aristotle talked about it. The course will cover environmental writings from the Romantic Period to the present and include the works of Thoreau, Whitman, Carson, Abbey, Dillard, Silko, Ghosh, and Sinha. This course will ultimately reveal how wider social forces shape the philosophical outlooks and aesthetic sensibilities brought to bear in writing about the environment, and ultimately, help students develop an appreciation for what the study of environmental writings from different societies and eras can teach us about ourselves and our shared humanity.

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.

Critical Thinking (to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information):

CTS: Critical Thinking Skills: The course will enhance critical thinking skills through consistent reading and class discussion of key ideas in environmental writings. The evaluation of critical thinking skills will be based on exams and class participation and may include written work. Exams will be designed to allow students to demonstrate their ability to evaluate and synthesize key ideas from the assigned reading. Class room discussion will focus on helping students better understand the nuances and complexities of environmental writings.

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

CS: Communication Skills: The course enhances communication skills through small and large group discussion of ideas, issues, questions, and themes central to course reading. The course will help students learn how to develop a greater understanding of environmental writings that may involve guided writing assignments in which they will receive feedback, exams in which students will be expected to effectively convey key ideas from the course succinctly and clearly, and class room discussion in which students will learn how to express questions and thoughts about the subtleties of each text, including film, music, photography, television, and even ads and bumper stickers, under examination.
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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):

SR: Social Responsibility: The course enhances social responsibility by providing students with a cross cultural understanding of how history, region, and broader social forces have shaped environmental writings. The evaluation of social responsibility will be based upon an end-of-the-semester short writing assignment in which students will be asked to reflect upon how their knowledge of literatures from previous historical periods and world cultures outside of their own has changed in light of the new information that they now possess. Students will be expected to demonstrate how key insights from the course have helped broaden their understanding of how history, culture, and philosophical outlooks have shaped environmental writings.

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

PR: Personal Responsibility: The course will teach personal responsibility by enhancing students' understanding of how to ethically use sources to craft a persuasive argument/answer to an essay question. In addition, in exams, writing assignments and class discussions, the course will engage students in reflecting on their own relationship as human beings to the rest of the natural world and to investigate their attitudes toward such issues as environmental justice, the impact of globalization on the environment, and the effects that environmentalism has on the poor and most vulnerable of human populations.

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