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?

Geography 305 describes and explains the geographic structure and character of the State of Texas. Geographic structure denotes the system of routes, places, and cultural regions that constitute the geography of Texas and its situation within the United States and North America. The course explains this structure as a complex artifact, constructed over the course of centuries by diverse peoples, and expressive of the changing technologies, economies, and cultural attitudes of these peoples. Emphasis is placed on the ways in which this geographic structure has been affected by cultural evaluations of physical environments, diverse peoples, and the meaning of the “good life.”

Students are taught how to interpret the political, religious, and cultural meanings that are inscribed in the human landscapes of Texas as well as its distinct subregions. Students are encouraged to appreciate the bold and subtle beauties of Texas’ many natural landscapes that contribute to the different cultural regions. Students who complete this course understand that the patterns they see on a map, and the landscapes they see out the window, are products of an ongoing process of interaction between many cultures and environments of this vast and varied state.

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):

Geography 305 engages students in their knowledge and assumptions of knowledge about Texas. Critical thinking in this regard is identifying and questioning assumptions and refusing to take “givens” without proper examination. This is important in human geography because spatial patterns and built landscapes appear to the untutored eye as natural and necessary aspects of a taken-for-granted reality. Students will employ concepts of demography, cultural history, socio-economic development and political territoriality to summarize Texas in larger geographic scales such as ration and globe as well as smaller geographic scales of region and place.

Student mastery of critical thinking will be assessed through objective exams that include significant map identification and understanding of current events and trends in the state. In addition, the landscape portfolio reflects multiple core objectives of critical thinking (creative thinking and synthesis of information) and communication (effective expression of ideas).

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

Geography 305 employs a large range of communication media. Somewhat unique to geography is cartographic communication that combines both visual and textual elements that represent not only static features but dynamic spatial and temporal processes. Students are taught how to interpret historic and contemporary maps, how to understand and appreciate photographs and landscape paintings, how to read graphs and statistical tables, and how to make use of historical documents and texts.
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Student mastery of communication will be assessed through different types of graded and ungraded work. Students complete a landscape portfolio that demonstrates landscape interpretation and effective visual and written presentation. Students will write small place descriptions of their hometowns or of suitable places that they use in their landscape projects. Students will produce a map with proper textual components and manipulate digital files of their landscape photography. In addition, students complete small group in-class problem-solving activities that lead to group conversation and class discussion. The other graded work is in the form of objective exams that incorporate proper understanding of map reading skills including interpolation.

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

Geography 305 explains the geographic structure of Texas as the product of human agency both past and present. The geographies and environments we inhabit today are the product of past decisions, and that the current and future generations are responsible for the future geographies we inhabit. Geography of Texas pays attention to the geographical expressions of economic and ecological exploitation, and social segregation as they pertain to larger national and global trends such as the diffusion of slavery to Texas and direct European migration to Texas.

Student mastery of social responsibility will be assessed through objective exams that include questions about these mobility processes as well as demonstrate an understanding of the constantly changing and diverse demographics of the state. Students aware of the interconnections of Texas to national and global scales are prepared to be engaged citizens at all geographic scales (local to global). Additionally, some exam questions require an understanding of how political and economic systems play a role in the overall society and how the individual fits into the structures of society.

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

Geography 305 addresses individual responsibility as citizens who are local and regional agents of change. Like exams before them that made a difference in the way we think about the state, they are future leaders and collective decision makers (in a democracy) that will make choices not only for their own quality of life but future generations. Geography of Texas, because of its local and regional (Texas) approach, develops an environmental awareness of surroundings that include human agency, human-environmental interaction, and aesthetics for natural landscapes. Student mastery of personal responsibility will be assessed through the landscape portfolios through their selection of topics and personal photography that demonstrate an awareness of choices, actions, and consequences. Additionally, exam questions require an understanding of personal responsibility in terms of how planning is used to address environmental pollution and land set-asides in Texas.

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