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?

In this course students will be able to evaluate the importance of plants in peoples’ everyday life, through reading and interpreting current data presented in scientific literature. Students will use the scientific method to interpret current research data that emphasizes the significance of the benefits plants provide people not only functionally, but aesthetically and socially. Information in the course, both in lecture, and outside readings, will allow students to objectively analyze data that indicates that plants benefit humans by improving both physical and mental health, quality of life, social well-being, community and neighborhood growth, improvement and health in both an active and passive role. These benefits will be evaluated in many types of urban settings including school gardens, public and estate gardens, assisted living homes, rehabilitation programs, prison programs, and community gardens. This course also focuses on the many different populations that plants benefit including children, adults, the elderly, prison inmates, and the disabled.

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):

Students will develop critical thinking skills by incorporation of “definition – interaction – integration – evaluation” relationships. Students will be able to: 1) define the role plants play in urban landscapes, 2) describe how people interact with plants in urban landscapes and green spaces, 3) evaluate the effectiveness of horticulture programs that are integrated into urban settings. Students will be able to recognize the importance of horticulture (gardening) and personal connections with nature in our modern culture.

Students will compare and evaluate garden characteristics and attributes related to various garden environments including children’s gardens (school gardens) and their importance in fostering the interaction between children and nature, community gardens and their importance in relationship to social problems such as neighborhood restorations, poverty, hunger and homelessness, prison gardens and their importance in rehabilitation, re-entrance to society, and job placement opportunities for inmates, and public and estate gardens and their role in the restorative value of nature and educational programs offered to local residents.

Strategies

Each lecture will begin with the definition of a specific urban program followed by the possible impacts and benefits this program might have on the urban population that it is targeted towards. An example would be the urban garden program targeted towards prison inmates. The lecture would begin with the definition of a prison horticulture program, the demographics of prison populations (definition of the audience the program is
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targeted towards), followed by the possible benefits of this program on the targeted audience including the gaining of horticulture skills. This is important in two aspects. Gardening is the number one hobby in the United States. Having knowledge in this area may help released inmates to integrate back into their community because it gives them a starting place for conversations and meaningful interactions. Secondly, it may benefit released inmates in possible job placement opportunities in the horticulture field. This is just one example of the numerous benefits and impacts this program might have that are discussed in detail during the lecture. To promote critical thinking, students will be assigned outside readings to propose “food for thought” questions from articles and text books on this topic and will be quizzed on these readings as to additional benefits of prison programs, their concept of the pros and cons of different prison programs, their evaluation of these programs, and the what they formulate as to the impact prison programs may have in the future.

How Evaluated

Quizzes and exams on each program area will have questions formulated to answer “food for thought” questions from those presented in class; additional readings assigned

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

How Addressed

Active learning is used in almost all lectures, which includes extensive question and answer dialogue with students during the class. Students will be given “food for thought” questions at the end of most lectures and the class will verbalize answers/solutions during this time. Students will complete a visual diagram on the different areas of sociohorticulture.

Strategies

Students will be given “food for thought” questions at the end of most lectures, and will spend the last portion of lecture verbally discussing the class answers. Or, questions will be raised during the lecture. Questions about gardening programs, including future impact of these programs in the changing urban environment will be used to stimulate self-reflections then dialogue. The majority of these questions will come from outside readings including current articles of the program of discussion. This is an effective approach to allow all students to express themselves and participate in classroom discussions. Students will also have a serious of quizzes (reflection papers) that will include questions and written reflections on outside readings and in class discussions.

All students will have past experiences with nature and gardening in some form, many passionate about the impact of particular gardening programs, which will allow them to express themselves. These programs deal with real world problems and similar benefits to all participants that will help students apply their education various real world urban environments.

How Evaluated

To make sure the student can independently express ideas, quizzes and exams will be used to test the student’s ability to express concepts interpretations and personal views in writing. The grade may not be based on whether or not the answer is right or wrong, but rather was the answer to the point, clear and succinct. The visual diagram will be discussed in class and evaluated as part of a quiz.

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

How Addressed

In almost all lectures, students will be given facts from outside readings, including current scientific articles, which will allow the student to formulate opinions on factual data that will lead them to informed conclusions about the benefits and impacts horticulture and gardening programs can have and current and future urban populations. During classroom discussion, numerical data will be presented, and scenarios given of alternate types of situations where the numerical data may differ, allowing students to analyze and come up with
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conclusions to future types of people/plant interactions as urban populations evolve and change.1

Strategies
Students will develop qualitative and quantitative skills in the area of social science by being able to interpret numerical data presented to them during lecture and through the outside classroom readings from articles and textbooks. An example of a current and future issue is the program including the “local food” movement and the rural/urban interface, whether these methods result in “healthier” foods, and how these programs have potential to help in world problems such as obesity and Type II Diabetes. Confusion and controversy currently surround these issues. Students will be given scientifically-proven data that will allow them to form their own conclusions by interpreting these data resulting in informed conclusions that are based on fact rather than fiction. Students will also be presented scenarios of future numerical data that reflects more accurately a changing population, allowing them to come up with individual and creative interpretations and solutions to people/plant interactions.

How Evaluated
Quiz and exam questions will be formulated to test the student’s ability to propose solutions to current social problems and correctly interpret current social issues by interpreting data on different horticulture and gardening programs. This will include cause and effect of these programs on the current and future urban “people/plant” environments.

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

How Addressed
This course examines the importance of community involvement through horticulture and gardening programs on community development and sustainability. Students will be given information on the importance of community involvement, through volunteerism, with various populations (including special populations such as “at-risk” children, different minorities, people with disabilities, and the elderly).

Strategies
During the duration of the course students will complete two service learning experiences by participating in horticulture, gardening, or other types of programs that accomplish their mission and goals with the help of volunteers. Students will be responsible for identifying programs that are of interest to them and contacting these programs to apply for volunteer positions. Students will have to volunteer for at least three hours for each volunteer experience. One of the volunteer experiences will be for course credit, the other for extra credit and is optional. An example of a volunteer experience in sociohorticulture would include volunteering for the organization “Brazos Beautiful”. The student would have to go to their website and find out what volunteer opportunities are currently available. The student would then have to fill out an application and be accepted for the volunteer opportunity that they have chosen. One of the favorite volunteer opportunities in the organization is the illegal dump clean-up. Students are responsible for showing up on time and spending at least three hours of their time involved with this organization.

How Evaluated
A service learning experience form will be placed on the HORT 335 website that the student takes with them to their volunteer experience. On the form the student has to fill out the name of the organization, what they did during the three hours that were spent volunteering for this organization, and how this experience relates to sociohorticulture. The form has to be signed by the supervisor of the volunteer experience and turned in before the final day of class. Students will get credit for completed volunteer forms.
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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.