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?

Across cultures and throughout history, people have developed contemplative practices through which they try to understand the human condition. In this course, we study those practices in modern societies. In wired, interconnected, fast-paced, performance-oriented societies, how do people cultivate stillness, solitude, and introspection? To what ends? What is the value of such practices in modern societies? This course analyzes philosophical ideas, religious beliefs, artistic expressions, and social values associated with contemplative practices, such as “mindfulness.” The course assesses how contemplative practices express human experience by countering the pressures of modern life, and how these practices affect human experience by cultivating specific mental and physical capacities. The course material shows students how people use contemplative practices to generate creative expressions (such as dance), enhance social consciousness (such as the cultivation of compassion), increase intellectual productivity (in business, government, and education), and improve health (medical applications of contemplative practices).

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):

Critical thinking is built into the course. Contemplative Practices in the Modern World asks students to think in new ways about a topic (contemplation) they might never have encountered or thought about. Students will formulate questions, analyze their observations, critically evaluate readings and research, and synthesize information in a final paper as well as in shorter papers and class discussion. Students may also use critical first-person analysis based on perspectives offered in course readings, as well as third-person analysis. The course asks students to critique the readings and compare different contemplative practices, rather than accept any practice or perspective, to identify contradictions in the goals of specific practices, and to critically examine seemingly contradictory applications of contemplation.

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

By design, this course requires developing and expressing ideas in writing. Students write 10 reflection papers in class and compose 3 short (3 page) papers that build the foundation for their final paper. In the final paper, students interpret or analyze a contemplative practice using critical thinking skills. Small group discussions, as well as discussions led by the instructor, are part of each class session. Discussion sessions allow students to
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express ideas verbally. A final presentation of their work in the last week of classes (Unit IV) ensures that students communicate with their peers. Students will include visual images in their presentations (powerpoint, photographs, film, demonstrations, websites, diagrams, etc.).

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

Contemplative practices in the modern world tend to emphasize social and personal responsibility. That emphasis is one of the reasons I chose to design a course on contemplative practices for the TAMU core curriculum. The course is organized so that students can study the techniques and goals of specific contemplative practices along with the social contexts in which people practice contemplation. Weekly topics in Unit III examine different uses of contemplative practices: education, health, global and local citizenship, business, and religion. These uses put the practice of contemplation in the context of social responsibility. Specific practices studied in Unit II come from different regions of the world: Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the United States and from different religious or social traditions. Studying the origins of contemplative practices in specific cultural contexts is intended to increase students' intercultural competence. The readings selected for this course focus on the use of contemplative practice as a form of engagement with society and culture and emphasize contemplative practice as cross-cultural.

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

No dictum is more central to the process of ethical decision-making than the ancient Greek maxim inscribed in the Temple at Delphi, "know thyself." Contemplation, in its many and varied forms, is one of the ways people try to know, or understand, themselves as ethical beings. The range of contemplative practices and uses of contemplation covered in this course introduces students to some of the ways human beings have sought knowledge of themselves and the world around them. The optional practicum component of this course (see last bullet under Final Paper) gives students the chance to put some of the analytical, interpretive, and critical work they are doing for the class into practice if they choose to do so. In this course, students study directly the ways contemplative practices increase people's capacity for ethical action (e.g., compassion) and cultivate the ability to reflect on thoughts and actions.

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