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?

This course analyzes major social problems confronting the world and the United States today. Social problems are defined for the purposes of this course as physical or social conditions that people perceive to be harmful, result from human social interaction, and can be alleviated or mitigated by social organization. The objective of this course is to use empirical scientific evidence, including statistics from national and international agencies as well as sociological research, to examine the severity and causes of and possible solutions for a breath of social problems that affect human well-being. These social problems include harmful human conditions that result from the global social trends of population growth, urbanization, and economic globalization, including dire poverty, sweatshops, modern slavery, population displacement and migration. Other problems include inequalities in education and health and inequalities related to race, ethnicity, and gender. Additional problems include deviant acts of drug abuse, violent crime, and child exploitation and neglect. The causes of many of these problems often lie in unequal power, economic, and prestige relations that permeate society's institutions and thereby inform its culture. Therefore, the proposed solutions examined in this course lie primarily in ways of organizing our social institutions.

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 purpose of this course is to enable students to think critically about social problems. Where possible, the assigned readings give more than one perspective about each social problem, and class discussions revolve around critiquing these various perspectives. The students are asked to question whether a particular condition constitutes a social problem, if the research evidence is sufficient to determine causes of the problem, and whether proposed solutions would be effective. An essay portion of each exam also asks for similar critiques. In addition, the course requires each student to submit a lengthy, in-depth critical analysis of a social problem of his or her choice. This project requires students to synthesize empirical information regarding the severity of the problem and synthesize and evaluate professional research regarding its causes. The students also evaluate existing attempts to solve the problems and proposed solutions. Finally, the students use their sociological imaginations to create possible solutions to the problems. Consequently, the instructor uses three means of assessment to evaluate critical thinking evidenced in a student's participation in class discussion, essay portions of three exams, and a term research project.
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Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

Three means of communication are developed and evaluated in this course: oral, written, and visual. Oral expression of ideas is developed and evaluated through student participation in class discussions about the social problems. Written expression of ideas is developed and evaluated through two means: (1) essay portions of three exams in which the students are asked to interpret and evaluate research or solutions related to a social problem discussed in class; (2) a minimum 15-page (3000 word) term research project about the severity and causes of a particular social problem and possible solutions to the problem. Visual interpretation of research data is developed through several means: (1) instructor lecture presentations of statistical data; (2) assigned readings; (3) the term project. In the lectures, statistics garnered by government and international agencies are most often visually presented in graph formats, so the students develop the ability to interpret complicated graphs. This ability is enhanced by assigned readings of sociological research that present quantitative data in graph and table formats. A substantial portion of each of three exams evaluates the accuracy of the students' statistical interpretations. Finally, the term project requires each student to interpret visual presentations of statistical tables and graphs from government or international agencies and professional research articles and books.

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

This course requires the students to interpret both quantitative and qualitative empirical data to analyze social problems. This data includes numerical statistics reported by government or international agencies and quantitative data and ethnographic observations reported in professional research articles. From their analyses, the students draw informed conclusions about the severity of social problems, whether the empirical evidence supports extant causal theories of the problems, and whether particular ways of trying to solve the problems have been effective. The empirical data is presented by instructor in power point slides and assigned readings, and the students' analytical conclusions are evaluated by three exams. In addition, a term project requires each student to report and similarly analyze empirical data and draw informed conclusions about a particular social problem of his or her choice.

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

Social responsibility is the raison d'être of a social problems course. The students in this course will mature to influence government policies through their votes and their leadership in government and volunteer agencies. The course is designed to inform them of problems affecting their fellow Americans and people throughout the globe and to enable them to think critically about these problems so that they can make good future decisions regarding policies related to these problems. Learning the perspectives of others is an important part of this maturing process. About a third of the course focuses on problems in other parts of the world, which requires learning about differences in cultural perspectives. The remainder of the course focuses on problems in American society, the understanding of which requires learning cultural viewpoints within our society that differ from their own. Finally, the strong focus on finding solutions to these social problems instills a feeling of civic responsibility in the students and gives them insight into how they can engage effectively in their local, state, national, and global communities to help solve these problems.
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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.