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 involves an analysis of the social construction and social experience of marriage and the family as institutions. In this course, we will discuss particular concepts of marriage and the family as important cornerstones of ways to structure social interactions on various levels, and especially relations of power and inequality in society. The objective of the course is to challenge our taken for granted notions about these topics, and ask the sociological questions, “How constructed/natural is the family?” and “What is marriage, and what is it for?” Students should leave the course with an understanding of the general sociological perspective on marriage and family as institutions and everyday practices, as well as be able to discuss and present informed and reasoned opinions upon these subjects. Students should be able to express themselves in a variety of written formats, and will produce basic analytical papers, involving mainly secondary research and preliminary primary research.

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):

Assignments assess students’ demonstration of critical engagement with various formats of micro and macro-level constructions and experiences of marriage and family as social institutions. This element will be evaluated through instructor’s assessment of 1) several pieces of analytical written work (written discussion responses, essay exams, and original papers). In class oral discussion (both spontaneous discussion based on course materials and connecting course materials to everyday experiences and prior/external knowledge) and oral responses to written discussion prompts) and interaction with lecture is also used to evaluate critical thinking skills.

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

Students will learn to evaluate information and arguments presented through different modes of communication including: statistical representation, verbal, written, and visual (including Census graphs and tables, and tables in research materials). There are two analytical papers, two essay exams, and several interactive discussion sessions (in class and in online group discussion) addressing their own interpretations of course materials, and linking those interpretations with the empirical world. The goal is to develop theoretical and methodological literacy, as well as their ability to present their own ideas in a nuanced and clear fashion. So, for example, early in the
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course students are presented with graphical representations of family formation types in American history, and then presented with the various Census forms used over time to construct these representations. Discussion of how categories have been constructed (with attention to racial, sexual, and class categories), assessed, and applied over time connects individual, public policy/legal, and social scientific definitions of marriage and family.

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

This element will be evaluated through instructor’s assessment of in-class and online exercises (e.g. discussion questions), essay exams, and analytical papers that convey the students’ ability to reflect upon course readings and lecture materials, making explicit connections between sociological concepts and the operationalization thereof, evidence, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks, students’ own past participation in local cultures, structures, and institutions, students’ observations of current cultural interactions, products, and values, and create sociologically analytical materials demonstrating understanding of & ability to apply theoretical frameworks. Quantitative and qualitative skills will be assessed by student’s performance on interpreting tables, statistics, and other empirical evidence (i.e. in-depth interviews, ethnographic research, and in-depth qualitative collection and assessment [e.g. of historical documents and/or media products]) that convey and analyze important aspects of different research materials.

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

Understanding how marriage and family are related to civic participation is a key component of understanding social responsibility. This element will be evaluated through instructor’s assessment of students’ written and oral work that analyses the multicultural and intersectional landscape of these fundamental building blocks of society, which includes an understanding that all subgroups, identities, and communities participate in making this complex, interconnected, and often volatile landscape through both everyday experience, the conveyance of values, and the creation, application, and contest over policies and laws that affect marital/familial definitions and practices.

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