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?

**URPN 202 – Building Better Cities** (formally URPN 301 – Intro to Urban and Regional Planning) meets the Social and Behavioral Sciences Foundational Component Area specifically by focusing on the systematic and creative human interventions to influence the growth and development of communities. In particular, the course exposes students to historical and current trends in human settlement patterns, the social, economic and environmental effects of human settlement patterns, and public interventions to mitigate and manage negative impacts and improve the general welfare of our communities.

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**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 essential in this course. During the course, students will be required to analyze and reflect on many problems resulting from land development and urban growth patterns (e.g. sprawl, environmental degradation, population and economic decline, etc.) as well as the effectiveness of various public policy interventions (e.g. land use regulations, environmental regulations, housing policies, urban renewal, etc.). Students are also challenged to propose solutions to pressing urban planning problems. Students will learn how to conduct independent inquiry and to evaluate and synthesize various sources of information in order to make informed judgments and propose realistic solutions.

This objective is addressed in the following learning outcomes:

- **SLO 1**: Describe the broad trends and discuss contemporary concerns in urban planning practice.
- **SLO 6**: Explore in depth contemporary planning concerns through an analysis and synthesis of the relevant scholarly and non-scholarly literature.

Various strategies are used to accomplish these objectives:

1. Structured in-class discussions;
2. Research papers;
3. Policy debates;

Student learning is evaluated through grading rubrics for assignments, as well as questions embedded in tests.
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Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

The ability to effectively communicate ideas through written, oral, and visual formats are considered are critical in the planning field and are incorporated as a core component of the course.

The specific learning objectives and strategies for addressing this objective include:
SLO 1: Describe the broad trends and discuss contemporary concerns in urban planning practice.
SLO 4: Identify, describe and evaluate the important components of the comprehensive planning process and the common implementation tools and techniques used in comprehensive planning.
SLO 6: Explore in depth a contemporary planning concern through an analysis and synthesis of the relevant scholarly and non-scholarly literature.

Strategies:
1. In-class discussion and debates;
2. Written assignments;
3. Class PowerPoint presentation. Students will be required to prepare and deliver a PowerPoint presentation to class on a community analysis that they have undertaken.

Each of these strategies have associated grading rubrics for assessing student performance.

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

Empirical and quantitative skills are also essential in the field of planning. Students are introduced to data collection techniques to conduct community assessments in order to define community problems and inform public policy interventions.

SLO 4: Identify and describe the important components of the comprehensive planning process and the common implementation tools and techniques used in comprehensive planning.

Strategies:
1. Several assignments will be given to help develop student skills in this area.

An example assignment would be to conduct a community analysis; a first step is preparing a comprehensive plan for a community. This type of assignment will require students to collect census data for a specific community for at least two censuses and analyze the socio-economic trends in the community. They will also collect information on major employers, land uses, zoning regulations, transportation systems, and community facilities. Based on the data they have collected, students will be asked to form some initial conclusions as to what they see as strengths and weaknesses in their chosen community.

Another assignment will ask students to research policies for addressing planning-related problems in the community and develop arguments in support and against the policies. Example policy debates include housing vouchers versus public housing to address housing affordability problems; sprawl versus smart growth; and pros and cons of tax incentives for economic development.
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Social Responsibility (to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities):

The contribution of people to the betterment of their communities and society from the local to global scale is covered through several facets of the course. In the course, students learn about the social welfare implications of urban development patterns such as pollution, environmental degradation, increased vulnerability to natural hazards, and so on. Students are also introduced to important concepts such as social equity, environmental justice, social and economic disparities, and global warming/climate change.

This objective is addressed through the following student learning outcomes:
SLO 2: Explain the legal, administrative, social and political contexts within which planning takes place.
SLO 5: Explain the nature and scope of various substantive areas of planning.
SLO 6: Describe planning issues that need to be addressed at a regional scale as regional and global planning issues.

Strategies for achieving the objective include:
1. Readings and lectures that cover topics such as citizen engagement techniques in planning, the role of community advisory boards, ethical principles for decision making in planning, and planning practices to promote social equity.
2. Structured in-class discussions to develop an appreciation of difficulties of balancing competing values
3. Assignments that require students to attend community meetings and encourage them to volunteer for local community events.

Student learning will be assessed through questions embedded in tests and classroom discussion.

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