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 370 – Introduction to Health Systems: This is the introductory course to this interdisciplinary field of study. It currently attracts students from six colleges at Texas A&M, predominantly the Colleges of Architecture, Veterinary Medicine, and Science, with a lesser number from the Colleges of Liberal Arts, Education and Business.

Fifty-four percent of the world’s population now lives in urban places. Over 80% of Americans and Texans live in urban places. Improved knowledge about sustainable, livable environments, particularly urban environments influence the qualities of the places where we live, and the lives we can live in them.

Healthcare accounts for nearly a fifth of the American economy. The health system in the United States is a vast enterprise that every American interacts with as patients, while assisting relatives or as health professionals. The costs, quality and access to care in the health system have been at the center of public debate since Franklin Roosevelt introduced Social Security in the 1930’s. URPN 370 introduces students to the history and organization of the health system in social, cultural and political context, in a way that creates informed citizens with a foundation from which to judge the great issues of today.

The purpose of planning, be it urban planning or strategic planning, is to create the future. To that end we make decisions today in light of their future effects in order to guide our communities or organizations to our preferred future. Health care, health systems and our society at large are undergoing many changes, not only because of the Affordable Care Act, but also because of continuing innovation in the sciences and related technologies, and changes in care delivery and access. Demographic and economic forces create challenges to our community systems and health systems.

People in numerous professions, not just in healthcare, are practicing in a fluid environment. Many of the jobs our students will have 20, 30 or 40 years from now do not exist today. URPN 370 introduces them to how long term planners think about issues, design solutions to problems and create actionable strategies to meet the challenges of the future. The methods of strategic planning taught in URPN 370 are broadly applicable in our students’ professional and personal lives, and as citizens.

While looking at how the health system fits into the urban systems of American communities, URPN 370 provides an overview of how individuals and groups interact with institutions generally. The course addresses current events like the debates on the Affordable Care Act, the disastrous explosion in West, TX, the ebola epidemic, the tsunami in Japan, and other current issues, to illustrate the general importance and broad scope of health related issues in our society. Current events and innovations also fuel the discovery of surprising connections between seemingly unrelated developments like driverless cars, 3D printing, touchscreen technology and high impact solutions to healthcare access, organ and limb replacement, and implantable regulators and monitors.

These class encounters demonstrate the wide applicability of the knowledge and techniques learned in this course. They meet the Foundational Component Area requirements for Social and Behavioral Sciences by exploring the behavior and interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions while making decisions about the preferred future for their organizations or communities. Strategic planning is an inclusive and interdisciplinary process that
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fosters evidence based decision making to guide the creation of a mutually agreed upon desirable future. The processes and plans people create reflect the built and natural environment, and the cultural, political, economic, technological and health context of our organizations and communities, using the health system to illustrate them.

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):

Strategic planning requires analysis, evaluation and synthesis of diverse types of information about the historical, social, political, economic, technological, environmental and health context of the community and its health system. Learning objectives for this course which address this core objective are:

LO 1-- recognize many of the effects of core beliefs, values and world views on decisions made by individuals, organizations, and communities and the cumulative effects of decisions in creating futures;

LO 2-- be able to develop, express and defend informed opinions on important issues based on knowledge using the historical development and structure of the U.S. health care system to illustrate;

LO 4-- be ready to contribute to an organization’s or community’s health planning process through the application of their understanding of the goals of strategic planning and each of the steps in that process, including their familiarity with basic methods and techniques associated with strategic planning processes.

Activities and assignments engage several different learning styles. Strategies used to foster various aspects of critical thinking and evaluate student accomplishment include:

1. Guest presentations by select executives and other health professionals that tie the concepts covered in class to practice.

2. Written assignments that require students to conduct research in scholarly or professional journals, and the serious lay-press, and evaluate the information and opinions presented. The final papers are a synthesis of their understanding of their research, concepts covered in class and the knowledge and perspective gained from their education thus far. In other cases, their papers require analytical or creative thinking about the projected impact of the information they have discovered for a profession of interest to them, on the health system, or on an organization’s or community’s strategic planning process.

3. Group projects further refine their creative thinking by requiring synthesis of multiple lines of inquiry into a coherent presentation of a concept, idea or projected innovation or trend in health, health care, or an area with significant implications for them.

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

Strategic planning, as taught in this course, is an inclusive and collaborative learning process for discovering strategic issues and creating ways to address them. Effective intergroup, intercultural communication is an essential skill for a successful planning process. Learning objectives that enhance communication skills include:

LO 1-- recognize many of the effects of core beliefs, values and world views on decisions made by individuals, organizations, and communities and the cumulative effects of decisions in creating futures;
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LO 2-- be able to develop, express and defend informed opinions on health related issues based on knowledge of the historical development and structure of the U.S. health care system;

LO 4-- be ready to contribute to an organization’s or community’s health planning process through the application of their understanding of the goals of strategic planning and each of the steps in that process, including their familiarity with basic methods and techniques associated with strategic planning processes.

Several different strategies are used to give students opportunities to hone their communication skills and evaluate their success:

1. Group projects by randomly assigned teams give students the opportunity to practice cross cultural communication, persuasive speaking, influencing group decisions and leadership. The final group presentation employs oral and visual communication techniques through demonstration, Powerpoint or other sequential images, music or video to communicate a concept, idea or possible future development/innovation in quality of life, health, health care and planning.

2. Written assignments provide the opportunity to interpret scholarly research or current issues, synthesize this information with course topics, and practice expressing complex ideas with clarity.

3. Opportunities to interact with visiting scholars and health care executives.

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

A well designed strategic planning process considers the historical, social, cultural, political, legal, economic, technological, environmental and health context within which the health system, organization or community operates. Since no one is a master of all these intellectual disciplines, teamwork is needed to conduct an “environmental scan.” Empirical and quantitative skills are necessary to complete the following learning objectives:

LO 1-- recognize many of the effects of core beliefs, values and world views on decisions made by individuals, organizations, and communities and the cumulative effects of decisions in creating futures;

LO 3—possess a working knowledge of a widely applicable planning process;

LO 4-- be ready to contribute to an organization’s or community’s health planning process through the application of their understanding of the goals of strategic planning and each of the steps in that process, including their familiarity with basic methods and techniques associated with strategic planning processes.

Basic analytical skills and concepts from demography, epidemiology and health, geographic information systems, competitor and market analysis, and other areas are introduced as informative elements for understanding the organization or community and its environment by the professor, guest scholars and health care executives.

Strategies used to demonstrate/practice and evaluate student learning include:

1. Demonstrations of the application geographic information systems to investigate health issues, and the opportunity for students to use the resources available in the Texas A&M Libraries for a mini-GIS project of their own.

2. Homework assignments that require students to search databases for information.

3. Tests that ask questions about the students’ understanding of analytical and information gathering techniques.

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

Health systems planning is an exercise of civic responsibility. It operates on a system, and encourages systems thinking. At the core of strategic planning is the identification of stakeholders and their diverse interests, agendas and power relationships. Planning process is steeped in the interactions of these groups. Therefore, strategic planning is an inclusive and collaborative learning experience that can foster intercultural competence and knowledge of civic
Effective intergroup, intercultural communication is an essential skill for a successful planning process. However, the potential consequences of missing or ignoring stakeholders are also explored. The environmental scan methodology can include or exclude segments of the health system’s community. A mature consideration of the determinants of health, human behaviors, underserved populations, consequences of the financing and insurance system for health care, mental health and other sensitive issues is included.

Learning objectives that address social responsibility are:

LO 1—recognize many of the effects of core beliefs, values and world views on decisions made by individuals, organizations, and communities and the cumulative effects of decisions in creating futures;

LO 3—possess a working knowledge of a widely applicable planning process;

LO 4—be ready to contribute to an organization’s or community’s health planning process through the application of their understanding of the goals of strategic planning and each of the steps in that process, including their familiarity with basic methods and techniques associated with strategic planning processes.

Achievement of the learning objectives above will prepare students to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities, because they will know an international language of planning process and techniques. Strategies used to explore this core objective and evaluate student learning include:

1. Group projects which offer opportunities to develop intercultural competence while learning to work in a randomly assigned diverse group. The projects themselves explore topics that can lead to consideration of the impact on health care quality and access to care for various population groups and geographic areas.

2. Written assignments offer the opportunity to investigate topics that may affect various cultural groups differently.

3. Test questions explore students’ understanding of the role of planners, of stakeholder identification and techniques for discovering strategic issues and focusing the organization on what really matters.

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