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 370 – Introduction to Health Systems Planning meets the Foundational Component Area description 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, and the highly complex health system. Strategic planning is an inclusive and interdisciplinary process that fosters evidence based decision making to guide the creation of a mutually agreed upon desirable future. The process and the plan reflect the built and natural environment, and the cultural, political, economic, technological and health context of the health system, organization or community.

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 for the health system requires analysis, evaluation and synthesis of diverse types of information about the historical, social, political, economic, technological, environmental and health context of the 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 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.

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 health related profession of interest to them,
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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;

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 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:
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1. Demonstrations of the application of 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 responsibility. 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.