General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: LING 21  Language and Thinking   GE Area A3 Critical Thinking

Results reported for AY 2013-14   # of sections eight (8)   # of instructors three (3)

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Department Chair: Swathi Vanniarajan   College: Humanities and the Arts

Instructions: Each year, the department will prepare a brief (two page maximum) report that documents the assessment of the course during the year. This report will be electronically submitted, by the department chair, to the Office of Undergraduate Studies, with an electronic copy to the home college by October 1 of the following academic year.

Part 1

To be completed by the course coordinator:

(1) What SLO(s) were assessed for the course during the AY?

SLO 1: Distinguish between reasoning (e.g., explanation, argument) and other types of discourse (e.g., description, assertion).

SLO 2: Identify, analyze, and evaluate different types of reasoning.

(2) What were the results of the assessment of this course? What were the lessons learned from the assessment?

For SLO1, students in all sections were required to complete, as homework assignments and as class exercises, problem sets that deal with identifying premises and conclusions as well as arguments from non-arguments (e.g. explanation, illustration, report, etc.). In these problem sets students were particularly required to explain their decision. This SLO was also assessed on the midterm and final exams. Students received feedback in all assignments and exams. Students’ grades on these assignments for both semesters range from 80 % to 96 % for one instructor and 86% to 93% for the other instructor. Students’ good performance was attributed by the instructors to the multiple ways in which the skill was enforced (homework, in-class exercises and discussion, midterm questions) and the feedback given.

For SLO2, students were required to complete problem sets where they identified the type of hypothetical syllogism (e.g. modus ponens, modus tollens, chain argument, denying the antecedent, affirming the consequent) as well as deductive arguments from inductive arguments. For deductive arguments students needed to determine whether they are valid, invalid, valid and sound, valid but unsound. For inductive arguments, students needed to determine whether they are strong, weak, strong and cogent, strong but not cogent. In all these, they needed to give reasonable explanations. Students’ grades from one instructor on these assignments range from 60 % to 90 % in both semesters. Additionally, students were assessed for their ability to evaluate different types of reasoning in the term papers in which students had to decide which arguments pertaining to their controversial topic were most convincing and show the reader why.
The process involved multiple drafts with feedback from the instructor. Considering all sections of one instructor together, approximately 88% of students (93 students out of 102) scored in the B to A range on the term paper. The same instructor also reports using diagrams in several ungraded homework assignments and in extensive in-class practice, including games, with feedback. Diagram creation for the representation of reasoning was assessed in a graded homework assignment. Most of the students (about 90% in all sections) mastered the simpler diagrams. Very few (roughly 20% in all sections) were able to master the more difficult problems.

(3) What modifications to the course, or its assessment activities or schedule, are planned for the upcoming year? (If no modifications are planned, the course coordinator should indicate this.)

Many students expressed their uncertainty in distinguishing deductive arguments from inductive one. The instructors propose to implement a step-by-step analysis of how one would distinguish a deductive argument from an inductive one as a repeated class activity in order to boost students’ confidence.

As far as the difficulty students exhibit with diagram creation, since this skill is no longer part of the new guidelines for GE Area A3, this unit will be discontinued in the course.

Part 2

To be completed by the department chair (with input from course coordinator as appropriate):

(4) Are all sections of the course still aligned with the area Goals, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), Content, Support, and Assessment? If they are not, what actions are planned?

[All sections are aligned with Area A3 goals and SLOs]

(5) If this course is in a GE Area with a stated enrollment limit (Areas A1, A2, A3, C2, D1, R, S, V, & Z), please indicate how oral presentations will be evaluated with larger sections (Area A1), or how practice and revisions in writing will be addressed with larger sections, particularly how students are receiving thorough feedback on the writing which accounts for the minimum word count in this GE category (Areas A2, A3, C2, D1, R, S, V, & Z) and, for the writing intensive courses (A2, A3, and Z), documentation that the students are meeting the GE SLOs for writing.

The students were required to write 3000 words throughout the semester. All instructors assigned homework assignments (Six homework assignments – response to problem sets in careful writing; 250 words each, 1500 words total), in-class exams, and depending on the instructor, either an extended term-paper project or two smaller papers for which students had to provide written responses. For the extended term paper, students submitted three drafts to which they received instructor comment that served as the basis for writing the subsequent draft. The complete final product consisted of at least 2,200 words of prose in revised, final-draft form. For the smaller papers, students submitted a decision paper where they described the context of a decision, investigated the decision-making process, explored their decision in terms of the type of logic they used, identified the premises that led them to the decision, and finally evaluated their reasoning (500 words); a response paper to a controversial issue presented as a prompt where students need to take a stance (1000 words); and, a paper on a controversial issue of the students’ choice (1000 words). In all sections, students’ writing surpassed the 3000 word minimum count.