General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: ANTH 12 Human Evolution
GE Area: Core B2

Results reported for AY 2015-2016
# of sections ___6 (2 jumbo)___
# of instructors ___3___

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Department Chair: Roberto Gonzalez
College: Social Sciences

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 September 1 of the following academic year.

Part 1
To be completed by the course coordinator:

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

   Area B2 GELO #1: students should be able to use the methods of science and knowledge derived from current scientific inquiry in life or physical science to question existing explanations.

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

   For the jumbo sections, the assignments utilized to assess GELO1 was to write two 750 word essays that focused on scientific methods and how the information obtained from these methods helped to change people’s perspectives. The first essay was on non-human primates. Students were asked to do a review of their favorite non-human primate with a focus on methodology to enable them to see how anthropologists study non-human primates and then use this information to protect non-human primates. Students were encouraged to consider studies on primates that question: our evolutionary relationships, make the medical community reconsider using non-human primates in experiments, enable us to understand non-human primate intelligence, and encourage us to conserve the non-human primate environments. Students who did well on this assignment grasped that scientific methods change existing explanations of our relationships with the other primates. For instance, many students focused on chimpanzees and the genetic information that has shown that we are more closely related to chimps than chimps are to gorillas. Other students focused on “cute” primates and after learning of studies of their behavior in natural habitats, students came to conclusions that having primates as pets was detrimental to the well-being of these intelligent animals.

   The second writing assignment was for students to explain which fossil they would like to find that could then be analyzed to fill in gaps of our knowledge in regards to human evolution. Students were encouraged to be creative, but to be realistic. Students did not fare well with this prompt; although, I repeatedly emphasized methods (such as different types of dating in different locations), there seemed to be still much confusion about how to analyze a single fossil and then use the information to understand human evolution. This is the more difficult paper of the two and asks students to really delve into the subject. Most students do a superficial job and, thus, make many writing and content errors. How much of the low grades were due to
these issues rather than comprehending the topic was difficult to assess. Fortunately, since multiple assessment tools are used, the learning objective was still adequately assessed and addressed.

In the smaller sections, students were assessed in the form of class discussions (forums) and writing assignments. In discussions, issues of evolution and formation of species were explored through reviewing previously accepted models of species formation in light of new data and more current scientific investigations, including advances in archaeology and genetic analysis. Some examples include: *Homo floresiensis*, peopling of the Americas. In regards to writing assignments, activities were centered around reviewing concepts of human evolution and genetics in light of recent advances in science. Examples include subjects on epigenetics, human origins and migrations.

In all sections, exams provide an additional assessment tool. Topics, such as *Homo floresiensis* and island dwarfism, modern human origins, and epigenetics are covered in the reading material and in class lectures; these subjects (and many others) that focus on scientific methods to understand human evolution and biology are included in the different exams to test students on their knowledge of the latest scientific advances that challenge our previous understanding of the subject.

In summary, it appears that students do learn about scientific methods and the knowledge obtained through these methods. In all courses, students are encouraged to view scientific views as changing when new evidence or new ways to explore old evidence is acquired. Understanding how we know what we know is a key feature in all the assignments mentioned here. Yet, students often have poor writing skills that may hamper professors’ ability to assess the learning objective outcomes and, thus, including discussions and exam questions in assessment is essential.

(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.)

Each semester, course instructors make modifications to the course by taking into account the qualitative SOTEs, what transpired over the previous semester, and new information that may have arisen in the field. Some of the changes planned for academic year 2016-2017 include encouraging students to keep up with the assigned reading by having reading quizzes; this is aimed at improving student engagement. Additionally, one instructor will add map homework assignments since students often do not do well on the map questions on tests. Also, a Latin prefixes and suffixes homework assignment has been planned to help students understand unfamiliar words, which will enhance their reading comprehension further.
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 (GELOs), Content, Support, and Assessment? If they are not, what actions are planned?

Yes.

Yes, all sections are still aligned.

(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 GELOs for writing.

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