General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: LING 123 Sound and Communication  
GE Area: R

Results reported for AY 2015-2016  
# of sections: 17  
# of instructors: 4

Course Coordinator: Daniel Silverman  
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Department Chair: Swathi Vannariajan  
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 to <curriculum@sjsu.edu>, 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 GELO(s) were assessed for the course during the AY?

GELO 3 A student should be able to apply a scientific approach to answer questions about the earth and environment.

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

Four instructors contributed to this report. They converge in their assessment that GELO3 is largely being met by various assignments that emphasize applying a scientific approach to answers questions about the earth and environment.

Dr. Kataoka reports that this GELO was assessed through (1) two essays and (2) midterm and final exams. In the spring 2016 semester, it was assessed through (1) four short reading response papers, (2) two essays, (3) midterm and final exams, and (4) a group presentation. In both semesters, grade points earned from these activities accounted for 80% of the course grade. Grades in the fall 2015 semester (three sections pooled: N=75) had healthy distribution with the following breakdowns: A’s = 31 (41.3%), B’s = 23 (30.7%), C’s = 11 (14.7%), D’s = 5 (6.7%), and F = 3 (4%). One student received WU, and another student took an Incomplete Option. While majority of students worked very well throughout the semester, there were some students who were not actively engaged in course work. They did not turn in essay assignments by due dates and performed poorly in the exams. Grades in the spring 2016 semester (three sections pooled: N=75) had healthy distribution with the following breakdowns: A’s = 25 (33.3%), B’s = 35 (46.7%), C’s = 13 (17.3%), D’s = 0 (0%), and F = 1 (1.3%). One student received WU. The great majority of students worked actively and consistently throughout the semester. Their essays were generally very well written, using findings from empirical studies as support of their own inferences on evolution of animal communication systems. Dr. Kataoka concludes that students work and learn well when they are given small but frequent assignments/tests with immediate feedbacks. These frequent activities and assessments also seemed to help students develop/maintain good
work habits. Based on the learning outcomes, she prefers using frequent small assignments and Quizzes that serve as practices for essays and exams.

Dr. Koo reports that the idea of the scientific approach is to formulate a hypothesis to explain a phenomenon and test the hypothesis by comparing its predictions with empirical and measurable data. His students practiced the approach mostly in a lab session. They listened to natural communicative sounds produced by various animals and learned how to take acoustic measurements. They also learned how to apply different filters to a sound and test predictions of an influential theory on how humans produce speech sounds called the source-filter theory. As my students learned how to do all this using a computer program called Praat, they were asked to answer a total of 20 questions. Their performance show that they have gained a clear understanding of the procedures. Mean percentage of questions correctly answered in each section were as follows: 96.90% (F15 Sec06), 98.05% (F15 Sec09), 97.80% (S16 Sec04), 98.90% (S16 Sec05).

Dr. VanBik assigns an essay on a comparison and contrast between the mating signals of Anurans and Passerines. Students are required to present comparing and contrasting analyses on these two orders’ mating signals. In these analyses, students used scientific approaches, such as: production mechanism in terms of anatomy and physiology; acoustic structure and degree of complexity of the signals; and the adaptive function of the mating signals. Their analyses also need to include how the environment and the ecosystem of their habitats play a role in the success of the species survival. He reports that grades on this assignment were as follows: Grade: A - 65 %, Grade B - 20 %, Grade C and below - 15 %. He concludes that students did very well overall, and he sees no need for modification of the assignment at this time.

Dr. Silverman reports that one of several assignments that addresses GELO 3 is one of his assigned essays: “Compare and contrast human language versus the vocalizations of non-human primates (monkeys and apes). In the case of primates, you should characterize and explain the vocal communications of Rhesus and vervet monkeys, and optionally other primate species as well. In the case of human language, you should review the design features of human language, and explain whether primate communication systems share these features. How do these systems compare in terms of adaptation, mechanism (anatomy), and ontogeny?” In one section, out of 15 possible points for this essay (which are graded on both form and content), 5 students received 15 points, 4 students received 14 points, 4 students received 12 points, 5 students received 11 points, and 5 students received 10 or fewer. Dr. Silverman is pleased with these outcomes, and sees no reason to modify the assignment at this time.

(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.)*

One instructor finds that a series of small assignments might be preferable to only a few larger ones.

**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, all 17 sections are well aligned with the area goals, SLOs, content, support and assessment.
(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.

The enrollment cap for the course is 25 and so these are not large sections. Student oral presentations are part of the course curriculum and are evaluated by both students and the section instructors.