General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title PHIL 160/Philosophy of Science        GE Area __R__________________________

Results reported for AY 2015/2016  # of sections __6________ # of instructors __4________

Course Coordinator: Janet D. Stemwedel  E-mail: janet.stemwedel@sjsu.edu

Department Chair: Janet D. Stemwedel  College: Humanities & 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?

We assessed GELO 3: Students will 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?

Across section, students engage this GELO in a variety of ways, including in research projects that examined both scholarly scientific literature on and popular discussions of anthropogenic climate change, where students identify the evidential structure of each source, especially its treatment of empirical data and uncertainty.

Most of the students demonstrated an ability to understand the various forms of scientific literature (how peer-review works and how scientific knowledge is built). They were able to assess the evidence and arguments that both scientists and non-scientists provide. Overall, they demonstrated an understanding of how scientific knowledge (regarding anthropogenic climate change) is built in the scientific community and how this knowledge is shared both within the scientific community and with the public.

(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.)

We feel that our current course design and methods of assessment are generally working for us. No modifications are planned.

Part 2
(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. -- Janet D. Stemwedel, Department Chair

(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.

All of the faculty members teaching Phil 160 require more than 3000 words in written work from their students, write extensive comments on papers, and provide sufficient time before the end of the semester for students to benefit from the comments. Our practice has been to assign frequent short assignments (e.g., 500 word essays) starting early in the term, with comments returned to students on each assignment before the subsequent assignment is due. Some faculty allow students to rewrite papers for a better grade, or encourage students to turn in a rough draft before the final paper. In addition, faculty with a load of over 130 students total for the semester are provided with ISAs, graduate students or senior philosophy majors, to help with grading. ISAs are trained by the faculty members in best practices for grading written work. Faculty for PHIL 160 go over ISA work themselves to keep an eye on quality, and provide additional comments in the process.

Each section of PHIL 160 is interactive and allows plenty of room for student involvement and class discussion, both in Socratic dialogue with instructor and based on small group work in class. In addition, PHIL 160 has students utilize online discussion groups to work through a research assignment for which each student is responsible for multiple written deliverables at the various phases of the assignment. The online discussion groups introduce an element of peer review in addition to the written feedback students receive from the instructor.

As is departmental policy, PHIL 160 instructors make students aware of our “Guidelines on Writing Papers in Philosophy,” a shared set of guidelines made available on our department website. In addition, they encourage students to make use of our Writing Center, which is staffed by ISAs for three days a week with the sole function of providing students who come in with feedback on writing. This is a supplement to faculty office hours, which themselves are devoted to providing writing feedback among other things.

-- Janet D. Stemwedel, Department Chair