General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: History 170S, Topics in American History: American Identities and Institutions

GE Area US1 and S

Results reported for AY 2014-2015   # of sections: 1 in S15  # of instructors: 1 in S15

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Department Chair: Patricia Evridge Hill  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 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 SLO(s) were assessed for the course during the AY?

US1: SLO 1: Students will be able to describe the principal events, developments, ideas, politics, and international relations in all the territories now in the United States from the beginnings of this society until the present. While considering these topics, students should be asked to analyze certain subtopics,

S: SLO 1: Students will be able to describe how identities (i.e. religious, gender, ethnic, racial, class, sexual orientation, disability, and/or age) are shaped by cultural and societal influences within contexts of equality and inequality.

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

I assessed SLO1 for US1 through in-class discussions and assignments, a cumulative final exam and a final research paper. In class, students analyzed primary documents individually and in groups to develop their understanding of how different diverse groups of Americans experienced the major events and developments of United States history. In the final exam, students completed identifications where they were asked to identify a major governmental policy or event, explain its impact on the particular group of Americans, and expand on the long-term implications of this policy for this group. An essay question assessed how the approach of the course in viewing history through the lens of minority and diverse Americans changed their understanding of the postwar period and the Civil Rights era. In a final research project, students chose an individual from United States history and researched how their life history demonstrated the major events and developments covered through the semester.

In this Upper-level course for non-majors, students covered the span of United States history from early settlement to the present through the perspective of diverse Americans. Students demonstrated good understanding of the principal events of this history, particularly in their answers to the final exam identifications and essay question. In the final exam, 8 students achieved “A” grade exams, 15 students achieved “B” grades, and 3 students achieved “C” grade exams. Some students struggled with the
identifications, and were only able to identify the government policy or event and not fully expand on its significance and impact on the particular ethnic or racial group. Students demonstrated good understanding of how individuals experienced major historical events in their research papers, choosing “ordinary” Americans to research and place their lives in historical context. 17 students achieved “A” grade papers and 8 students achieved “B” grade papers. This assessment particularly engaged student’s imagination and allowed them to perform well.

I assessed SLO 1 for Area S through a midterm exam and an in-class reflective essay. In the exam, students had to complete an analysis of a primary document detailing the creation of racial identities in colonial Virginia. Students were assessed on their ability “to describe the document, explain its significance, and expand its context.” Students also answered an essay question concerning the creation of racial and ethnic identities through coalitions and conflicts created during the westwards expansion of white settlers and their interactions with Native Americans, African American slaves, Mexicans, and Chinese and Japanese immigrants. At the end of the semester, students completed a reflective essay that considered the creation of Mexican American identity in San Jose, CA from the Spanish settlement to the present. Students were asked to write a in-class reflective essay (time limit of one and a half hours) using a monograph that had been read throughout the semester to debate how Anglo settlement brought new patterns of conquest and resistance among Mexican Americans.

In this Upper-level course for non-majors, students showed significant progress in understanding the creation of identity in the United States through the semester. In the midterm exam, 10 students achieved “A” quality papers and 15 students achieved “B” quality papers. Students used the document to demonstrate overall excellent understanding of how racial identity became tied to freedom during the early colonial period, using the text of the document to illustrate this argument. They demonstrated in the essay how viewing westwards expansion from the perspective of minority groups changed their perspective on this period of history and demonstrated how conflicts between groups help to create and solidify racial and ethnic identities. The best students were able to identify the significance of the admittedly limited opportunities for coalition between ethnic groups and the reasons why these coalitions were so difficult to sustain. By the time of the reflective essay, 18 students achieved “A” grade papers and 7 students achieved “B” grade papers, demonstrating how their understanding of identity had evolved throughout the semester. Students demonstrated great nuance in their treatment of Mexican American history and the significance of persistent inequality. The best students were able to draw perceptively on the arguments made by historian Stephen Pitti in the book we read throughout the semester, while the weaker students made more use of the class text and discussions to answer the question.

(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.)

In the future, I plan to institute a clearer system for assessing in-class discussion and writing assignments, so that all work can be graded for credit.

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? Yes.

(5) This course was capped at 25 students.