General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: Phil 110: Science, Technology and Human Values  GE Area: V

Results reported for AY: 2016-2017  # of sections: 5  # of instructors: 2

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Department Chair: Janet Stemwedel  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?

SLO 3: Students shall be able to explain how a culture outside the U.S. has changed in response to internal and external pressures.

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

The aim of PHIL 110 is to show students that science and technology are not isolated, self-governing enterprises. Rather, like all human endeavors, they are situated in social, cultural, and political contexts, which shape scientific research and technological development, and which in turn are shaped by them. Demonstrating the ways cultures outside the US change in response to internal and external pressures is central to this objective. Over the course of the semester, students learned about and analyzed a number of different cases of cultural-scientific/technological influence. Two examples: In reading the biologist Richard Lewontin’s “A Reasonable Skepticism,” students considered the ways 19th Century European political culture created the foundations for Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection, and about how that theory in turn transformed Europe’s political culture—dismantling notions of group determinism and giving rise to the concept of the liberal individual. And they studied Don Ihde’s “Cultural Hermeneutics,” learning about how the Puluwatean navigators in the South Pacific had historically relied on first-person navigational techniques, but with the introduction of the compass began to perceive and understand themselves and their relation to space in a new, third-personal way. In these and other cases, students wrestled with the ways that science and technology disrupted long-settled cultural ideas. By examining cases about cultures other than their own, students were able to put aside their own cultural convictions and analyze cultural change more or less dispassionately.

In order to assess the SLO 3 learning outcomes students engaged in a variety of assessments. They wrote in-class “daily reflections,” conducted small-group discussions, took unannounced quizzes, and completed two take-home examinations. In addition, the course culminated in a critical analysis paper,
in which students selected a technology that interested them and used the conceptual tools developed throughout the semester to analyze its cultural and ethical implications. As indicated by the students’ more than satisfactory performance on this range of assignments, the majority of students are meeting the SLO 3 learning objective.

(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 believe that the current course design and methods of assessment are effective. Still, based on feedback received from student and peer evaluations, Dr. Susser is continuing to refine and improve the course for the next academic year.

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, Janet Stemwedel.

(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 enrollments for 110 in AY 2016-2017 were: Fall 2015, sec 01: 40, sec 02: 62; Spring 2016, sec 01: 48, sec 02: 45, sec 03: 45. The enrollment limit for Area V is 40. 45 is 12.5% more, and 62 is 55% more. So, several sections were somewhat larger. In this class students are supposed to write a minimum of 3000 words. In all sections of Phil. 110, regardless of size, the instructor allows all students the option to submit their research paper (which is 1500-2000 words in length) early for feedback, in order to give them the opportunity for extra revision. This typically happens a week before papers are due. He gives extensive written and oral feedback upon request, meeting with students individually to ensure the feedback is understood. In addition to the final papers, students write two take-home exams, each with a minimum 1000 words. Thus the total word count for the semester is well above 3000 words. This count does not include in-class written reflections, reading response questions, and written group work.

The larger classes do not pose a problem for getting sufficient feedback. If sections are exceptionally oversized they are graded by the instructor of record with the assistance of an Instructional Student Assistant (ISA). The ISA must be approved both by the Instructional Assistant Coordinator and the Philosophy Department Chair for their excellence in both composition and their expertise in the field of philosophy at issue. Whenever an ISA aids in the grading of a large course, s/he provides feedback along with grading. In all cases, when the help of an ISA is employed, the instructor of record must explicitly notify the students of the class that some writing assignments have been graded and feedback has been provided by an ISA. If a student is unhappy with an ISA grade the instructor of record will rereads the paper, provide additional feedback, and regrade the assignment (if that is warranted.) Generally speaking, any instructor who is teaching more than 100 GE students in a semester receives ISA help. This course regularly falls in this category.