General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title  PHIL 133/Ethics in Science

GE Area  V

Results reported for AY 2015/2016  # of sections  2  # of instructors  1

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 2: Students shall be able to identify the historical context of ideas and cultural traditions outside the U.S. and how they have influenced American culture.

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

Students learned about the different strategies for achieving objective results in primatology that arose independently among Japanese primatologists and U.S. primatologists in the first half of the 20th Century, and how these distinct methodologies have come to influence each other as an international community of primatology emerges. The students also considered how the objectivity of modern science has been called into question because of gender and racial biases. We used a reading response essay to gauge students’ grasp of these historical developments and their influence on the present culture of American science.

We used another essay assignment and a case study response to gauge students’ ability to explain the historical and cultural influences on attitudes in the U.S. and elsewhere regarding biomedical research with human subjects, paying special attention to the Hippocratic Oath (ancient Greece), medical experiments in Nazi Germany, recent clinical trials in modern sub-Saharan Africa, and more recent revelations of U.S.-led research on vulnerable populations in Guatemala and debates about placebo-controlled trials of an Ebola vaccine in West Africa. We used embedded questions on exams to assess students’ ability to explain how current ethical regulations in the U.S. respond to cultural considerations from human populations outside the U.S., and to explain why certain segments of the American public express distrust in the biomedical establishment despite these regulations.

Most students were able to identify the historical context of ideas and cultural traditions involved in the development of scientific methodology and responding to the practice of science, and to identify their influence on American culture, both within and without the tribe of science. Students became
more articulate in their explanations of these connections as the term went on.

(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

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, Department of Philosophy

(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.

Instructors of PHIL 133 require more than 3000 words in written work from 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, 300 word initial responses to case studies, 700 word analyses of scholarly scientific and popular sources) starting early in the term, with comments returned to students on each assignment before the subsequent assignment is due. Faculty encourage students to turn in a rough draft to receive comments 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 133 go over ISA work themselves to keep an eye on quality, and provide additional comments in the process.

Each section of PHIL 133 (including the largest) 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 130 has students utilize online discussion groups to work through the first case study 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 133 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
Although some sections are above the GE limit this does not pose a problem for getting sufficient feedback. The instructor of record provides feedback and grades all writing assignments and welcomes, if not requires, first drafts of all writing assignments and provides feedback on drafts. 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.