General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title ANTH 012 Human Evolution

Results reported for AY 2013-2014 # of sections: 7 # of instructors: 4

Course Coordinator: Elizabeth Weiss E-mail: elizabeth.weiss@sjsu.edu

Department Chair: Chuck Darrah 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, by the department chair, to the Office of Undergraduate Studies, with an electronic copy to the home college by September 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?

Student Learning Objective #2: Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to demonstrate ways in which science influences and is influenced by complex societies, including political and moral issues.

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

For each of the sections, a writing assignment was used to assess the SLO. All three instructors reported that the students did grasp the complex relationship between science and society.

For the large ANTH012 section, the assignment used to assess SLO2 was a 3-pag writing assignment on race, DNA evidence in the courts, or the cross-cultural differences and similarities of sexual attraction. Students could write on one of three articles: Evolution in the Everyday World by Mindell; Effects of Sexual Dimorphism on Facial Attractiveness by Perrett et al.; or Understanding Race and Human Variation: Why Forensic Anthropologists are Good at Identifying Race by Ousley et al. Most students chose to discuss either the Ousley et al. article or the Mindell article. They were asked to explain their topic and summarize their reading, then to describe how this is an example of the interlacing relationship between science and society. Most students did well on this assignment; they understood, for example, that forensic scientists can use skulls to identify race because of past (and present) racial segregation in the US. Those who chose the Mindell article understood that DNA evidence has changed the course of many cases and that many individuals have been freed after being wrongly charged of crimes. These articles also allowed students to see how evolution can be used to understand our behavior; such as, we may state that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” but we have evolved to find particular traits, such as those that indicate youth, attractive. These preferences, students learned, are cross-cultural and, thus, science influences our society. In the smaller anthropology sections, other similar articles were chosen, such as one by Jared Diamond and an article by Atlers and Atlers.

Another similar assignment was that students wrote a three page essay about racial inequality in health. The instructor wanted students to understand how culturally defined racial groups
influences biomedical research. The instructor urged students to question interpretations of the racial disparities in health.

Finally, one instructor decided to use the science some pivotal individuals and their contributions to the discipline and society as a whole. And, she also used a writing assignment regarding the Kitzmiller vs. Dover case on Intelligent Design in the classroom to address how society influenced the law and teaching of science in schools.

All instructors agreed that assigning specific articles or topics rather than have students find their articles or decide on a topic helped students focus on the learning objective rather than on the search for materials.

(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.)

No modifications are planned. But, it is important to add new reading material or switch reading materials to keep up with the ever changing field.

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? If they are not, what actions are planned?

Yes. GE coordinator Weiss regularly staffs the course and meets regularly with the instructors. The department integrates assessment discussions into regular faculty meetings. In addition, the course is one that is offered consistently throughout the CSU and California community colleges and the department’s instructors are highly experienced in the course content and learning objectives. The 2013-2014 assessment was initiated by the department chair due to Weiss’s fall 2013 sabbatical and concluded by her in spring 2014.