General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title ANTH 012 Human Evolution       GE Area B2

Results reported for AY 2014-2015     # of sections: 6    # of instructors: 2
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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 #3: Students should be able to recognize methods of science, in which quantitative, analytical reasoning techniques are used.

(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. Both instructors reported that the students did grasp the complex relationship between science and society.

   For the large ANTH012 sections, the assignment used to assess SLO2 was a 3-page writing assignment on a controversy in paleoanthropology. Students were encouraged to choose any controversy that we discussed in class or other controversies. For students who had difficulty choosing a controversy; I had a set of articles that they could choose from. Topics that were commonly chosen included: was “Lucy” a male or female, what is the origin of H. sapiens, who is the first hominid, and were Neanderthals their own species or a subspecies of H. sapiens. Students papers had to explain the methodologies scientists used to draw their conclusions; they needed to explain, for example, how ancient DNA helps to address the Neanderthal controversy or how comparative morphology with apes can be used to answer questions about sex in Lucy. Each paper had to give information on methodologies for both sides of the controversy. Students were also encouraged to detail how the data were interpreted (or analyzed) by multiple scientists. Most students were able to comprehend that data, which is gathered using very stringent methods that can be replicated by other scientists, can still be interpreted in multiple ways.

   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 wanted the students to explore how culturally defined racial groups may influence people’s health especially blood pressure. She assigned three peer reviewed journal articles to them. In the articles, researchers collected self-rated skin color and used handheld narrow-band reflectometers to quantify skin color; their results indicated that it
was neither the actually skin color or self-rated skin color that could impact the blood pressure of a person, it was the disparity between these two colors increasing a person’s risk of having high blood pressure. Most students were able to give a good summary of these studies and pointed out that the racial inequalities in health are largely due to stress caused by discrimination, and cannot be used as evidence of fundamental biological differences among racial groups.

Both 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. But, finding good source material is a skill that students should master, which is why the instructor for the large section also allowed students flexibility in choosing their articles.

(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 other instructor. 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.