General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: ARTH 70A  GE Area: C-1

Results reported for AY: 2013-14  # of sections: 2  # of instructors: 2

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Department Chair: Anne Simonson  College: H&A

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?

All.

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

ARTH 70A is part of a two-course survey on the history of Western art and with its companion course (ARTH 70B) is widely taught in universities, colleges and AP high school classrooms in the US. ARTH 70A focuses on the art of Europe, the Near East, and North Africa from approximately 30,000 BCE to 1400 CE. It is a standard course which uses a textbook (usually packaged for two semesters) covering thousands of years of history with complex cultural and historical exchanges and transitions and with the emergence of three major world religions.

SLO 1 (recognition) is assessed by quizzes and tests, based on study guides, study images, vocabulary lists, classroom activities, presentation groups who “own” certain segments of the course material and teach it to others, and discussion of how to prioritize information. SLO 2 (affective and analytical response) is measured by in-class and take-home essays, papers, and homework assignments. SLO 3 (writing) is measured by evaluation of the quality of written assignments collected for SLO2. The relative comprehensiveness or depth of understanding of “the historical or cultural contexts in which specific works of art were created” and the “accomplishments of and issues related to women and diverse cultures reflected in such works of art” are also measured by written assignments. We have now used reading logs or other reading comprehension tools in all sections for more than six years and assign a wide variety of readings in addition to the very large and comprehensive (but well-organized and straightforward) textbook. Students are required to summarize chapters, to paraphrase sections of text, to respond to standard sets of questions about diverse cultures, to evaluate primary and secondary source articles, to collect factual information and to analyze perspectives of different authors. Group projects and visits to local museums resulting in a museum and/or research paper required in all sections also demand the use of outside sources and familiarity with some basic art history research resources.
Instructors of ARTH 70A have worked together for many years, regularly compare notes on teaching and assessment strategies, and are part of an art history faculty that meets for a minimum of six hours/semester to discuss issues of student learning. We have come to understand that our students’ success in meeting the learning objectives of ARTH 70A has to contend with four issues:

(a) course complexity – the difficulties of acquiring the immense vocabulary to discuss the production, aesthetic values, and technical processes of art combined and associated with the widely varying social and cultural contexts for its use. As in some of the sciences, our discipline makes use of a variety of classification schema: chronological, geographical, stylistic, technical.

(b) reading comprehension – the considerable difficulties that many students have with reading and processing written information rather than just cutting and pasting it.

(c) the need to “see” in a new way and to analyze visual information,

(d) students’ general unfamiliarity with history coupled, in some cases, with an intensely personal and religious take on history. Students from a creationist background, for instance, are horrified to find the Neolithic taken seriously; students from fundamentalist traditions are likely to take their familiar religious texts as truth and to be quite willing to argue chronology, historical facts, and/or interpretations.

The strategies described above have increased student learning enormously and have made it possible for students to deal effectively with the density of the course material, to make decisions about it, and to commit to learning in ways that they didn’t anticipate. As an example, the final question in Simonson’s logs asks students to select one favorite item from the chapter and to describe both the appearance and the production of that object, and then to explain in what ways it typically functioned in the culture which produced it; regular practice with such open-ended questions enables students to succeed with all course objectives.

In 2013-14, course materials, including images, course materials and assignments were further enhanced within the digital learning environment, encompassing both the department’s Visual Resources Library and Canvas.

As in previous years, the variety of readings is constantly revised and updated, bringing the latest stylistic analyses and interpretations to the students, and maintaining the relevance of the readings to the many works of art that are currently on exhibit in local museums.

(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.
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?