General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title ANTH 011 Cultural Anthropology  
GE Area D1

Results reported for AY 2013-2014  
# of sections: 7  
# of instructors: 3

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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 #2: Students shall be able to identify and analyze the social dimension of society as a context for human life, the processes of social change and social continuity, the role of human agency in those social processes, and the forces that engender social cohesion and fragmentation. **Students will be able to recognize the interaction of social institutions, culture, and environment with the behavior of individuals.**

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

Instructors used assignments in which students read and discuss several ethnographic studies of other ways of life using a reading guide and then participate in structured group discussions designed to help them: (1) grasp the concepts of agency, social structure, and economic mobility; (2) identify cultural contradictions that affect the conduct of daily life; and (3) utilize anthropological methods. In 2013-2014 students worked with the books *All Our Kin*, a classic ethnographic study of a poor urban community that is regularly used in the course. *All Our Kin* allows students to understand each element of the SLO by linking compelling stories of the individual lives of poor African Americans to the larger socioeconomic structures in which they act, thereby allowing students to understand the constraints on individual choice and the opportunities and limits for social change. Reading questions are distributed to focus the students’ attention on key themes addressed in the ethnography and prepare them to discuss it. Attention is given to kinship networks as forms of insurance in times of need and how they could be both beneficial and burdensome. Students answer objective exam questions and participate in small group discussions using guides provided by the instructors.

The goal of these assignments is to develop student skills in operationalizing social analysis. Although students perform well at analyzing the ethnographic materials presented, they typically find it difficult to apply their insights to new contexts. Such higher-order cognitive skills require lengthy practice and the difficulty our students encounter is not surprising. The assessment suggests that students are at least making tentative progress in "stepping back" from the social contexts in which they find themselves and being able to search for patterns in individual behavior and patterned conditions that affect individual decision making.
(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.)

There are no plans to change assignments or assessment of this SLO, since the primary difficulty instructors report is the broader one of enabling students (who are usually quite young in this course) to step back from their lives and to analyze them in ways that allow them to transcend the typically individualistic American framing of action. This can only be addressed by simultaneously addressing all the SLOs, since exercising this higher level cognitive skill needs reinforcement from multiple sources.

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?

This assignment and variants of it have long been used in this course. The assignments and assessment are clearly linked to the SLO and to the larger goals of social analysis. The instructors meet to discuss assignments, study guides, discussion prompts, etc. and I am confident that the classes are taught comparably and that the SLO is being assessed in a way that supports continuous adaptation to a changing student population.