**General Education Annual Course Assessment Form**

Course Number/Title: ANTH 146 Culture & Conflict  
GE Area: SJSU Studies Area V

Results reported for AY 2014-2015  
# of sections: 2  
# of instructors: 2

Course Coordinator: Guadalupe Salazar (fall 2014-spring 2015) and Chuck Darrah (summer 2015)

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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?

   *Area V SLO#3: Explain how a culture outside the U.S has changed in response to internal and external pressures.*

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

   The instructors I triangulated three texts about Islam and the Middle-East (focused mainly on Iran) in order to meet Student Learning Objective #3. The texts consisted of Persepolis, a well-respected graphic novel by Marjane Sartrapi, a chronicle of the Iranian Revolution narrated from the perspective of her childhood experience; *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* by Edward Said; and a public lecture covering the geo-politics of the Middle East since roughly the end of World War II by the journalist and filmmaker, Tariq Ali. Together these texts provided 1) an insider’s account of the Iranian Revolution and the social fissures within Iranian society; 2) a critical appraisal of the reductive and often erroneous dominant narratives distributed by American news outlets about “Islamic culture”; 3) a sweeping, “big picture account,” of the geopolitics linking the West and Middle East since World War II.

   Together these three texts were tools for helping students develop a more nuanced grasp of both the internal and external forces operating in Iran before, during, and after the ouster of the Shah. Together these texts demonstrate the internal complexity and plurality of Iranian society in order to disabuse Western students of the singular or stereotypical images of Iranian “culture”, as well as the complicated history of allegiances and interests operating between mostly British and American governments and leaders.

   The culmination of weeks of in-class discussion about these texts was a written assignment through which students were asked to use examples from the texts to explain the social science concepts of “essentialism” and “historicization.” In this case, students were asked to articulate how examples from Western media created essentialized or reductive images of a singular “Iranian culture,” whereas Sartrapi’s text – no less than the experience of a number of Iranian-American students taking the class – demonstrated cultural plurality as great as anywhere else in the world. Second, students were asked to articulate how these essentialist images were related to the depiction of Iran in Western media – and to historicize the way that cultural biases mask the games of economic interest and power operating between nation-state actors.
Far from any blanket – or black and white -- dismissal of American interests in the region, or simple binaries of oppressor/oppressed, the goal of the assignment was to help students critique orientalist images that demean the ordinary people in Iran living under forms of political repression, to learn to distinguish cultural and political plurality in foreign countries, and to grasp the role of nation-states and economic interests as key power-brokers largely hidden from view behind orientalist stories of the “medieval” character of Middle Eastern peoples.

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.)

Students were able to grasp and apply the concept of essentialism, and were able to recognize the historical development of the region under discussion. Yet, they would re-invoke orientalist memes popular in Western media or us/them thinking (“timeless conflict going on for millennia”). In other words, students could recognize essentialism in one context, yet in another fall back into stereotypes. Likewise, despite their ability to articulate the history of economic interdependency between the West and Iran, and the cynicism that students often expressed over this less-than-ideal situation, students were challenged and defensive when it came to objectively describing the role of the US state in international affairs, more intent on defensively justifying American perceptions than working through the objective and cosmopolitan task of sober scholarly inquiry and global citizenship.

We conclude that ANTH 146 successfully challenges deeply-held presumptions and some chauvinistic stereotypes based in American Exceptionalism, and the distrustfulness that colors American sensibilities about foreign countries. The task of putting America in a global context with others requires that students, first, debunk or unlearn certain chauvinisms, and second, that they begin to build a more robust and cosmopolitan world picture. These two processes are cyclical. Without the second – a new sustainable ability to articulate a global vision – students found themselves struggling to extricate themselves from stereotypes of foreign nations. The second process of helping students develop a set of intellectual habits to sustain a cosmopolitan global picture relevant to the flows and mobilities of the 21st century is an ongoing task. And it requires more exposure to detailed accounts of foreign lives that help students empathize with others and reject reductive stereotypes.

Presently, there are no plans to dramatically change the assessment activities, but the instructors will continue to develop curricula that sensitize students to the role of social context in framing how Americans understand their own and other societies.

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?

The course is taught by an instructor who has taught the course for many years and a newer instructor familiar with department assessment practices. I have reviewed the assignments and they are clearly consistent with anthropological practice and the SLO. Because we offer few sections of the course and they are staffed by experienced instructors who consult with each other and the coordinator about the assignments I am comfortable that the sections are offered consistently. The specific assignment used to assess SLO 3 clearly makes explicit the processes by which societies change.

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
The anthropology department is addressing practice and revisions in writing with larger sections of ANTH 146 in the following ways: (1) by employing a mutually supportive teaching team that includes a stable group of experienced instructors; (2) by coordinating construction of assignments that facilitate efficient assessment of student work, including assessment of student writing; and (3) by developing increasingly streamlined procedures for providing feedback to students in a timely fashion. If provided with adequate resources (which do not currently exist), the anthropology department would welcome