General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: EnvS 100W: Environmental Research and Writing

GE Area: Z

Results reported for: AY 2012-2013

# of sections: 2
# of instructors: 1

Course Coordinator: Lynne Trulio
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Department Chair: Lynne Trulio
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?

SLO3: Organize and develop essays and documents for both professional and general audiences, including appropriate editorial standards for citing primary and secondary sources.

Other: Issues of Diversity

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

This SLO was evaluated with a final paper in two sections of EnvS 100W that had a combined total of 50 students. Development of the Final Paper was accomplished through a series of smaller assignments intended to guide the student through their research and writing process. The assignments were:

a. An autobiography and passions paper, where the student identifies a broad topic/topics that interest them and which can be developed in subsequent assignments.

b. A specific research question, developed from the student’s background research/general knowledge paper, which will be answered using the primary literature.

c. An outline, developed and edited to ensure that the organization and development of the topic is logical and clear.

d. A powerpoint presentation, in which students presented their topics and background information.

e. The research paper, written using all previous work. Several drafts of the research paper allow the student to reorganize and edit several times as necessary.

Of the 50 students taking this course, an average of 69% received an ‘A’ or ‘B’ and 12% received a ‘C’ on these assignments. These results show the majority of students in this course are performing relatively well on this SLO.

Students benefited from building a final paper with discrete assignments because the process and individual tasks associated with writing a research paper can be broken down and assessed at numerous times and in different ways during the semester. They also benefited from having multiple peer and instructor reviews of their work; it improved their grammar and the organization of their final papers, and allows students to make corrections to their citations numerous times. A common difficulty was finding a focus and drafting a research question. Students often have good general knowledge of the topic that interests them, but have not done specific research in their field that focuses them on a real research question (as opposed to a focused literature review).

The instructor included diversity issues in the course by encouraging students to pursue topics related to diversity, by supporting them in the development of their research questions and papers, and explaining the importance of these issues to the field of environmental studies. The entire class was exposed to these topics when students gave their presentations. Examples of research topics that were
tackled in 2012-2013: Effects of Land Grabs in Africa on Traditional Lifestyles; Can Urban Gardens Solve Food Desert Issues in Inner Cities?

(3) What modifications to the course, or its assessment activities or schedule, are planned for the upcoming year? (If no modifications are planned, indicate this.)

Overall, the instructor and course coordinator are pleased with student performance on this SLO. However, to improve student performance the instructor added a "general knowledge paper" assignment in Spring 2013, in which the students used secondary literature and other sources to develop the background section of their papers. Students did well on this assignment and the instructor felt it improved overall student performance on this learning objective. Beyond this addition, we do not have course modifications planned. However, the instructor is seeking better ways to link research assignments to the development of the research question; an assignment that asks the students to write a short piece that summarizes their research for a general audience may achieve this goal. The instructor currently uses powerpoint slides and a presentation for this purpose, but a written paper may improve student performance.

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?

All sections of EnvS 100W are aligned with the Area Z SLOs and course assessment procedures. The instructor(s) teaching the course communicate with each other on lectures and assignments and they also work with Dr. Trulio on assignment development and assessment to ensure the course meets the SLOs and that SLOs are effectively measured. Instructors typically meet with the course coordinator twice a year and are in regular contact with the coordinator on course assessment.