

Geography BA

Demonstrate Knowledge Of Cultural Concepts In Geography

Goal Description:

Students completing the core courses required for a Geography degree will demonstrate knowledge of cultural geography including both human systems and the interaction between the environment and society.

RELATED ITEMS/ELEMENTS -----

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Demonstrate Knowledge Of Cultural Concepts In Geography

Learning Objective Description:

Students completing the core courses required for a Geography degree will demonstrate knowledge of cultural geography including both human systems and the interaction between the environment and society.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Cultural Geography Concepts

Indicator Description:

Students will correctly answer the embedded questions on exams during the semester that address cultural geography. The areas of emphasis include human systems and the environment and society.

Criterion Description:

Students will score 70% correct on those questions pertaining to each of the two areas of emphasis associated with cultural geography concepts.

Findings Description:

FINDING: Student Learning Outcomes Concerning Cultural Concepts

Students enrolled in GEOG 3350 scored an average of 70% on a set of questions focused upon human systems. Students enrolled in GEOG 1321 and GEOG 2301 scored an average of 67% and 72% on those same questions. These scores were slightly higher than scores generated from the previous assessment. Students enrolled in GEOG 3350 scored 64% on questions concerning the interaction of the environment and society, while students enrolled in GEOG 1321 scored an average of 63% on these questions. The scores on these questions were below expectation for both courses, and did decrease slightly from the previous year. Students enrolled in GEOG 2301 scored on average of 71%, a lower score than recognized from the previous assessment, yet still slightly above expectation.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Addition of New Course on Sustainable Development

Action Description:

ACTION: The most identifiable student weakness relevant to cultural geography pertained to the identification of connections between human society and the environment. Yet it did appear that students performed well on this subject when enrolled in one particular course (GEOG 2301) that more directly focuses on this subject matter. Based on this recognition, in Fall 2016 we will be offering another new course that also straddles the study of both human systems and the environment; Sustainable Development.

Training Geographically Informed Students

Goal Description:

Students completing core education in geography will be able to demonstrate foundational knowledge of geographic principles and concepts about the physical world.

RELATED ITEMS/ELEMENTS -----

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Demonstrate Knowledge Of Foundational Concepts Of Physical Geography

Learning Objective Description:

Students completing the core education in geography will demonstrate knowledge of physical geography including the world in spatial terms, places and regions, and physical systems.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Physical Geography Concepts

Indicator Description:

Students will correctly answer the embedded questions on exams throughout the semester that address physical geography. The areas of emphasis include the world in spatial terms, places and regions, and physical systems.

Criterion Description:

Students will score 70% correct on those questions pertaining to each of the three areas of emphasis concerning physical geographical concepts.

Findings Description:

FINDINGS: Student Results Concerning Physical Geography Concepts

Students enrolled in GEOG 1321 scored on average 64% on those questions pertaining to the world in spatial terms. This score is slightly lower than the score found the previous year, and slightly lower than expected. Students enrolled in GEOG 1401 scored on average 63% on questions assessing this concept, less than expected although higher than that of evident from the previous year. Students enrolled in GEOG 2301 scored on average 75% on these questions, a score higher than expected. Students performed as well on this assessment area as they did on the exams as a whole.

Students enrolled in both GEOG 1321 and GEOG 2301 scored on average 72% and 74%, respectively, on questions pertaining to concepts of places and regions. Both scores are slightly higher than was found the previous year, and both scores meet expectations. Students enrolled in GEOG 1401 scored on average 59% on such questions, a lower score than realized previously, and one that did not meet expectations. In those this assessment area students generally performed as well as they did on exams as a whole.

Students enrolled in GEOG 1321 scored 62% on questions pertaining to physical systems, while students enrolled in GEOG 1401 scored 64% on such questions. Both scores decreased slightly from that of the previous year. Students enrolled in GEOG 2301 scored on average a 77% on these questions, a score that represents and improvement when compared to the previous assessment cycle.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Addition of New Courses Focused on Physical Geography

Action Description:

Student performance on content and concepts pertaining to physical geography has been a weakness of our students for some time. The most significant action we will make to improve this weakness will be the offering of new courses that will fall within this sub-field (ex. Introduction to physical geography, hydrology, and environmental sustainability). Providing students these additional course options will significantly increase their exposure to subject areas where they need improvement.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

First-Year Foundational Geographical Principles And Concepts

Learning Objective Description:

Students completing core curriculum education in geography will be able to demonstrate foundational knowledge of geographic concepts and principles, including critical thinking.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Comprehensive Final Exam

Indicator Description:

Common embedded questions on the comprehensive final exam will determine student knowledge regarding general geographic concepts.

Criterion Description:

The average scores will be 70% correct on the general geographic concept questions embedded in the comprehensive exam.

Findings Description:

FINDINGS: Performance On General Geographic Concept Questions

Students enrolled in GEOG 1401 averaged 61% on a series of specific concept questions embedded in a comprehensive final exam. Students enrolled in GEOG 1321 averaged 72% on a separate, yet very similar, series of concept questions. As was the case in the previous assessment cycle, scores for GEOG 1401 students were consistent with overall average scores on the respective final exams, while scores for GEOG 1321 students were significantly higher than final exam averages. The scores among students enrolled in GEOG 1401 were slightly higher than those from the previous year. The scores for students enrolled in GEOG 1321, while slightly lower than the previous year, did still meet the 70% criterion.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Enhancing exposure to charts/graphs/maps

Action Description:

One clearly identified component of a geographic education that students seems to struggle with is the familiarity with and comprehension of charts, graphs and diagrams used to demonstrate geographic phenomena. A weakness in this area is especially noticeable among students registered in GEOG 1401. Moving forward, we plan to increase the use of graphs/charts in lab sections of GEOG 1401, with the assumption being that students may more effectively learn these skills when exposed to such devices in a more intimate setting (as opposed to being exposed to them in a large lecture-based environment).

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Comprehensive Final Exam - Geographic Principles Portion

Indicator Description:

The final faculty-developed comprehensive exam will indicate students' grasp of major geographic principles, including critical thinking.

Criterion Description:

The average score will be 70% correct of the major geographic principles and critical thinking items embedded on the comprehensive exam.

Findings Description:

FINDING: Performance On Questions Pertaining To Major Geographic Concepts And Critical Thinking

Students enrolled in GEOG 1401 averaged 63% on a series of questions focused on competency with major principles and critical thinking skills that were embedded in a comprehensive exam. Students enrolled in GEOG 1321 averaged 74% on a similar series of questions. In both cohorts of students this represents an improvement from results found from the previous assessment cycle. Students also improved in both courses on questions requiring the interpretation of graphs and charts, although students enrolled in GEOG 1401 still performed below the identified 70% criterion. Students enrolled in GEOG 1401 averaged 58% on such questions, while students enrolled in GEOG 1321 averaged 70%. Students enrolled in both courses once scored significantly lower than expected on questions requiring the interpretation of basic statistics, although scores for both sets of students improved slightly from the previous year. Students enrolled in GEOG 1401 averaged 53% on such questions, while those enrolled in GEOG 1321 averaged 60% on them.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Enhancing exposure to charts/graphs/maps

Action Description:

One clearly identified component of a geographic education that students seems to struggle with is the familiarity with and comprehension of charts, graphs and diagrams used to demonstrate geographic phenomena. A weakness in this area is especially noticeable among students registered in GEOG 1401. Moving forward, we plan to increase the use of graphs/charts in lab sections of GEOG 1401, with the assumption being that students may more effectively learn these skills when exposed to such devices in a more intimate setting (as opposed to being exposed to them in a large lecture-based environment).

Update to Previous Cycle's Plan for Continuous Improvement

Previous Cycle's Plan For Continuous Improvement (Do Not Modify):

Based on the assessment of 2014-2015, it would appear that we have improved somewhat in the teaching of both basic and major geographical concepts, but only among students completing one of our introductory courses (GEOG 1321) assessed. Students enrolled in GEOG 1401 demonstrate scores that are persistently below the acceptable level. As identified earlier in earlier assessments, the dichotomy in regards to learning outcomes between the two courses is almost certainly due to the fact that the various sections of GEOG 1401 offered included rather large classes (over 80 students). These larger sections of GEOG 1401 (Weather & Climate) also enroll a cross-section of studies from across the university, as opposed to a disproportionately higher number of majors (which is the case with GEOG 1321). For this reason we plan to continue to more assertively implement methodologies that seem to work in GEOG 1321 into the smaller "lab" sections of GEOG 1401. The inclusion of a new course within the curriculum (GEOG 2301) seem to enhance the learning of physical systems among our students, an effect that seemed to prevail across all courses. For this reason, we plan to use the results of this assessment to explore the potential addition of more new courses that could prove valuable in increasing the learning of "niche" content critical to the realization of a geographic education (maybe an in-house statistics course designed specifically for geography majors?). Our most immediate plans call for the inclusion of two more of introductory courses in assessment efforts (GEOG 2355 & 2356). Given that these courses are designed to focus explicitly on subject matter pertaining to "world regions," a major learning goal of geography majors, we feel the incorporation of them in assessment efforts will help provide a clearer picture of what our students are learning and what they are not learning.

Update of Progress to the Previous Cycle's PCI:

UPDATE TO PLAN FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Closing Update:

Based on the assessment of 2015-2016, it would appear that we have slightly improved our teaching of both basic and major geographical concepts, but only in certain areas and/or only among students completing a select number of our courses (for example, students in GEOG 1321, 2301 and 3350 generally perform better than students enrolled in GEOG 1401). This dichotomy is almost certainly due to the varied nature of the courses assessed. Weather & Climate (GEOG 1401), a course where students perform less well, is a core curriculum course enrolling large numbers of students from across campus (over 80 students per section). The other courses assessed (GEOG 1321, 2301 and 3350) enroll smaller numbers of

students (30 or less), with many of the students enrolled being geography majors. For this reason we plan to continue our efforts to more assertively implement methodologies that seem to work in GEOG 1321 into the smaller “lab” sections of GEOG 1401. It must be noted that this can be a challenge when the lab TAs are undergraduates themselves. That said, students enrolled in 1401 did improve their performance in areas pertaining to both “world in spatial terms” and “interpretation of charts & graphs.” Pedagogical methodologies previously utilized in other geography courses (1321 & 2301) to teach these two subject areas were newly implemented in GEOG 1401 labs during this last year. In short, our efforts towards improving the delivery of important concepts in 1401 through the incorporation of methods proven successful in other courses have already proven somewhat successful.

The offering of Environmental Geography (GEOG 2301) has enabled us to effectively teach concepts related to physical systems among our students, a finding overwhelmingly supported by the results of this assessment. Partially due to this recognition, we have arranged to offer a new course specifically focused on Physical Geography. The new course has been approved and will be offered for the first time in Fall 2016 and will be required of all geography majors. The new course will be taught by a newly appointed environmental geography, who in time will offer a number of courses in the sub-area of physical geography. We expect to incorporate the new physical geography course in future assessments, which should enable us to more accurately gauge how effective we are at delivering content relate to physical systems.

Our plans to include two additional introductory “regional geography” courses in assessment efforts (GEOG 2355 & 2356) had to be put on hold this past year. The reason for this was that both courses had to be partially redesigned to meet the needs of a host of education majors, many of which are now required to enroll in them in order to complete their degrees. Now that this transition has been made we will be assessing student performances in these courses, specifically when it comes to focusing on the learning pertaining to “world regions.” The inclusion of these two courses in assessment efforts will provide a clearer picture of how effective we are at teaching a critical aspect of a geographic education.

Based on previous recognition that students were not performing all that well when it came to basic statistical procedures, we implemented a requirement that all geography majors complete an introductory statistical course. However, as of yet this change has only applied to a few of our new majors. It is our prediction that the impact of this change will not really show up for a few years. This past assessment demonstrated that some of our students improved their performance in this subject area, but not all. Depending on the outcomes of future assessment, there may be a possibility that we deem it necessary to develop our own “in-house statistics course specifically designed for geography majors.

Plan for Continuous Improvement

Closing Summary:

Based on the assessment of 2015-2016, it would appear that we have slightly improved our teaching of both basic and major geographical concepts, but only in certain areas and/or only among students completing a select number of our courses (for example, students in GEOG 1321, 2301 and 3350 generally perform better than students enrolled in GEOG 1401). This dichotomy is almost certainly due to the varied nature of the courses assessed. Weather & Climate (GEOG 1401), a course where students perform less well, is a core curriculum course enrolling large numbers of students from across campus (over 80 students per section). The other courses assessed (GEOG 1321, 2301 and 3350) enroll smaller numbers of students (30 or less), with many of the students enrolled being geography majors. For this reason we plan to continue our efforts to more assertively implement methodologies that seem to work in GEOG 1321 into the smaller “lab” sections of GEOG 1401. It must be noted that this can be a challenge when the lab TAs are undergraduates themselves. That said, students enrolled in 1401 did improve their performance in areas pertaining to both “world in spatial terms” and “interpretation of charts & graphs.” Pedagogical methodologies previously utilized in other geography courses (1321 & 2301) to teach these two subject areas were newly implemented in GEOG 1401 labs during this last year. In short, our efforts towards improving the delivery of important concepts in 1401 through the incorporation of methods proven successful in other courses have already proven somewhat successful.

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