General Information

1. Name / Number of Course / Sequence:
   HONR 1007/HONR1017: Interdisciplinary Seminar in Technology and Culture

2. SLO(s) being assessed:

   Student will be able to read analytically and critically, be able to critique and construct an argument effectively, and be informed and engaged citizens of the United States and the world.

3. Department:
   Honors College

4. Department Representative:
   William F. Trimble

5. AGSC Content Alignment:
   AREA II: Humanities

Assessment Information

6. Assessment Method: [Explain how assessment for the measures associated with this SLO – not grading for the course as a whole was conducted.]

   HONR 1007: To evaluate how well the course had prepared students to address the various SLOs, faculty members designed a final exam essay that would be given to all class members. Students were given a brief excerpt from the English philosopher/politician Francis Bacon’s essay New Atlantis. In the work Bacon argues that monarchs should take a more active role in encouraging the discovery of new knowledge. To this end, Bacon describes a utopian “New Atlantis” in which the leader
establishes “Solomon’s House,” an “Order or Society” dedicated to the accumulation and production of new information about the world. Bacon’s description of this new “Order” reminds the modern reader of nothing so much as a prototype for a research laboratory or university.

Students were asked to read the work and compose a short essay that addressed a number of questions, including “What was Solomon’s House?” and “What was the responsibility of the king for establishing this institution?”

Faculty members graded their own students’ exams, and the student performance on the essay comprised a portion of their final exam score. To evaluate the class as a group, faculty members were also asked to photocopy a random sampling of their students’ responses (randomly chosen via a program written by Prof. X) and submit them to the course leader, Dr. Y.

HONR 1017: Faculty followed a similar approach in designing the SLO evaluation during the Spring semester of the course. In this case, students were asked to analyze an excerpt written by Gandhi in which the Indian leader pondered the meaning and significance of Gandhi, his philosophy that given India’s unique history, population, and cultural makeup the country should reject (or, at best, carefully adopt after suitable modification) Western technology. Again, students were asked to answer a number of questions about the document in the form of a short, well-written essay.

7. Findings: [What assessment data did each assessment method produce?]

HONR 1007: Faculty members then rated the essays using the previously approved Assessment Rubrics for each of the three SLOs. These rated the student’s ability to meet each SLO on a scale of 1-5. For example, the rubric for SLO #2 (which evaluated the ability to critically analyze a piece of evidence) assigned a score of 1 if “Student fails to understand arguments,” 3 if “Student generally understands arguments,” and 5 if “Student fully understands the arguments.” A similar rubric was constructed for each of the SLOs. As a group the students performed quite well, as might be expected from students in the Honors College. Seventeen (17) essays were evaluated for each of the three SLO categories; this meant a total of 51 evaluations were performed. The average, or mean, score for SLO #2 was 4.2, for SLO #3 was 4.1, and for SLO #8 was 4.2. Of the 51 evaluations, no student scored a “1,” and only 1 scored a “2.” On the other hand, 16 of 17 students (94%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO #2, 12 of 17 (71%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO #3, and 14 of 17 (82%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO #8. (Please see attached breakdown of scores for further details).
In short, students enrolled in the Fall 2010 section of Technology and Culture (HNC 1007) performed very well. Indeed, it would be fair to say to that they exceeded expectations.

HONR 1017: Again, students performed well. The average, or mean, score for SLO #2 was 3.8, for SLO #3 was 3.6, and for SLO #8 was 3.4. Of the 75 evaluations, no student scored a “1,” and only 5 scored a “2.” On the other hand, 16 of 25 students (64%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO #2, 14 of 25 (56%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO #3, and 9 of 17 (36%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO #8.

8. How did you or will you use the findings for improvement: [What questions / issues/ concerns did your data raise for the faculty teaching the course? What discussion did the faculty have about the findings? What future actions to improve student attainment of this outcome will the department / program takes as a result of this analysis?]

In order to determine more precisely the effectiveness of the course in preparing students to meet the objectives the Tech and Culture faculty decided to administer a brief questionnaire to the students at both the beginning and end of the course. This will establish a baseline that could be used to evaluate later findings. This requires some administrative effort to evaluate and collate the results, especially at the beginning of the term. Second, the small sample size might reveal the same statistical anomalies – or, perhaps better, uncertainties – revealed in this examination. We have also considered ways to standardize essays, quizzes, exams, etc. The tests for each group were designed by the faculty members assigned to that cadre of students. As a result, there is no real way to effectively compare performance between the different sets of students. Homogenizing the exams might also disrupt what both students and faculty found one of the most positive and rewarding aspects of the course: that the interdisciplinary faculty provided a unique perspective of viewpoints.

9. Additional comments: [What else would you like the Committee to know about your assessment of this course or plans for the future?]

The statistical data from the Fall term “high” sample and those from the Spring term “low” sample might not be valid without comparing those data with the results of the assessment from the current and successive academic years. To us, what is more important for purposes of this assessment is that results from both terms demonstrate that students in the course performed well above average during both semesters. This is encouraging, and suggests the course and the faculty are successfully meeting the SLOs.
10. Core Curriculum General Education Committee Comments:

There could be more discussion of how the data collected will be used to improve instruction --if not overall, at least in selected areas. The amount of student work collected wasn't clear from the report, though it seemed to be small-- the program should consider ways to increase data size (perhaps by embedding assessment of the outcomes in all grading during course?). The breadth of the faculty discussion on how to use the findings to improve instruction wasn't clear from the report.