

PS 201: American Government and Politics

Assessment Report, Fall 2003

I. GER objectives, student outcomes, means of evaluating the outcomes

GER Objectives (objectives for courses meeting the requirement for a course in the visual or performing arts)

The course will help students to:

1. deepen their understanding of aesthetic, cultural, and historical dimensions of artistic traditions; and
2. strengthen their ability to interpret and make critical judgments about the arts through the analysis of structure, form, and style of specific works; and
3. strengthen their ability to create, recreate, or evaluate art based upon techniques and standards appropriate to the genre.

Course Outcomes. At the end of the course, students will be able to

1. analyze the historical, cultural and aesthetic dimensions of the works of art studied in the course and combine these dimensions in a synthesis of the work as a whole. (GER objective #1)
2. interpret and make critical judgments about a work of art by analyzing its structure, form and style. (GER objective #2)
3. evaluate a work of art based upon techniques and standards appropriate to the genre. (GER objective #3)
4. grasp the impact of the style and structure of a work of art on its theme (GER objective #2)
5. judge whether an interpretation is more or less valid, more or less compelling, while understanding that no interpretation is so definitive that further interpretations are impossible. (GER objective #2)
6. evaluate the different concepts of inquiry and discovery that are embodied in the various works of art analyzed in the course. (GER objective #3)
7. describe the process of inquiring into the unique significance of a work of art that is ambiguous, complex and challenging (GER objective #2).

Means of evaluating the outcomes

1. Weekly assignment: write a critique of a reflection on a salient idea from class discussion. The salient ideas are written up and reported at the end of each class. Once a week, a student writes a reflection on one of the salient ideas from two weeks previous. The critique is written two weeks after the reflection of which it is a critique. The critique identifies two aspects of critical thinking in the reflection that need improving and does enough rewriting to indicate what the improvement would look like. The two aspects are chosen by the student from the following: accuracy, precision, clarity, depth, breadth, logic and relevance. This exercise enables me to see the students' ability and their growth in the ability to analyze the works of art discussed in class. (Measures outcomes #1,2, 5,7)
2. Three-page paper on *Copenhagen* by Michael Frayn and the way the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle informs the structure of the play. (Measures outcome # 2)
3. Presentation and paper on one of three topics (creativity, risk, ethical issues) as that topic is raised by some of the works of art studied in the course (Measures outcomes 2, 3, 4, 6)
4. Final exam. (Measures outcome #1, 2, 4)

II. Summary of evaluation for each of the outcomes

1.
 - a. During the course of the semester the students showed steady growth in their ability to report accurately the comments made in class analyzing the historical, cultural and aesthetic dimensions of the works we studied. By the end of the semester everyone was able to report, reflect on and criticize salient ideas reliably.
 - b. On the final exam all the students demonstrated they had achieved this outcome, though there was

some minor historical inaccuracies in their answers.

2.
 - a. Students also showed steady progress toward this outcome during the course of the semester through their daily and weekly written work.
 - b. Many students had difficulty understanding what is entailed in analyzing the structure of a work as a whole, and many of the short papers (3 to 5 pages) had to be rewritten. All the rewritten versions demonstrated the ability to interpret works of art by analyzing structure, form and style. Many of the rewritten papers were better than the papers that earned the grade of A- and were not rewritten.
 - c. In their presentations, students focused far more on the topic than on the work of art raising the topic. This having been pointed out to them, the written forms of these presentation corrected the problem.
 - d. About three-quarters of the students demonstrated on the final exam that they were able to interpret works by analyzing structure, form, and style.
3. About seventy percent of the students demonstrated in their class presentations and papers that they were able to evaluate works based on techniques and standards appropriate to the genre.
4. About seventy percent of the students demonstrated in their presentations or papers or exams that they grasped the impact of the style and form on the content.
5. All the students demonstrated in their weekly writing assignments that they could evaluate the validity of their own interpretations as well as those of others.
6. All the students demonstrated in their presentations and papers that they were able to evaluate the concepts of inquiry and discovery embodied in the works of art studied during the semester.
7. Through their weekly writing assignments all the students demonstrated that they are able to describe the process of inquiring into a work of art that is complex and ambiguous.

III. Effectiveness of the Course as a GER course in the Visual and Performing Arts

All the students in the class were very interested in inquiry, and that provided a good entree into the arts. There were some students in the class who had had bad experiences with the arts in high school, but the course was palatable to them because of this connection to something to which they were committed. There is, however, a down-side to this advantage, and I need to address it the next time I teach the course: because some students are more interested in the concepts of inquiry and discovery they tended to look in the works for illustrations of a concept of inquiry that they already had rather than doing deep and careful analysis of the works and letting a concept of inquiry, its risks and ethical issues, emerge from that analysis.

IV. Changes since last Guided Assessment

Not applicable

V. Changes

1. Students learned how to analyze works of art without knowing that that was what they were doing, so when I then asked them to do an analysis they did not know that they knew how to do that. To correct this problem, I plan to frame sessions in which we do analysis with some explicit talk about the process of analysis and evaluation. I plan to offer some definitions on the first day, and insist that we stick with them rather than let these definitions gradually emerge from discussion.
2. I wove comments on the historical background of works of art into the discussion, but because I offered them simply as one more component of the discussion, which they dominated, many students missed the fact that this historical background is important. Next time I plan to have students make reports on historical background before students first see or read the work of art, and frame these reports with comments on the kind of importance historical background may have.
3. The prompt for the presentations and papers needs to be reworded to make it clearer that the concepts of inquiry, risks, creativity and ethics must arise from the works themselves, and not from students=other experiences, which the works of art are then used to illustrate.