Description of Grant Supported Activity

The 2013 Curriculum Development Grant supported the development of a new course to this campus entitled, “The Anthropology of Addiction” (Addiction and Society) to teach during the 2013-2014 academic year. I developed the course during the summer and fall of 2013 and taught the course during the spring 2014 semester.

The course was developed to 1) add to the number of courses available for anthropology majors and minors, 2) introduce non-majors and minors to the academic and applied anthropology, and 3) provide a course that takes a multidisciplinary approach to the study of drug use and abuse. I decided to teach the course as a B 399 common core course. In this manner, course could fulfill the common core requirement for anthropology majors as well as be more accessible to majors outside of anthropology. Exposure to this course by majors and non-majors alike will demonstrate the utility of anthropology in addressing real world issues in general and substance abuse treatment in particular. Not surprisingly the course filled within a couple of weeks of its availability. I even let one student enroll over the course capacity of thirty.

The course provides a holistic approach to the study of addiction to alcohol and other drugs. More specifically and following in the tradition of anthropology, course content reviewed the cultural (i.e., learned beliefs and behavior associated with addiction and the ethnic and gender diversity of addiction), social (i.e., an examination of the institutions and organizations associated with addiction including substance abuse treatment programs, the alcohol and pharmaceutical industries, the illegal drug trade, and criminal justice system), and political (i.e., the consideration of how phenomena such as racism, sexism, and capitalism manifest themselves in addiction causation, prevention, and treatment) aspects of addiction. In addition, the course provided an extensive critique of the exclusively biological (i.e., genetic and psychological) approaches to treatment, the disease model of addiction, and the standard addiction Alcoholics (and Narcotics) Anonymous treatment program. Cross-cultural and alternative approaches to addiction and substance abuse were also explored. The primary goal of the course was to give students a broader understanding of substance abuse causation, prevention, and treatment.

I assessed the students’ understanding of addiction through written assignments on the course readings, class discussions, and a research project involving interviews with addicts, friends and relatives of addicts, and treatment counselors. More specifically, 70% of the student assessment grades were based on written assignments. This included the writing of three commentaries, a book review, and a research project totaling about twenty double spaced pages of work. Twenty percent of the students’ course grade was based on the completion of a pretest and posttest
essays on their perceptions of the cause, prevention, and treatment of drug use and abuse. Ten percent of the course grade was based on class participation. The class discussions were quite lively and allowed the students to express their personal perspectives and experiences on drug use and abuse. I also supplemented the assigned reading material with numerous Youtube videos that elaborated on the content provided in the texts. The students found these videos informative and equally entertaining. This helped keep the students interests and linked the text content with the discussion.

My evaluations of the course from the students were quite favorable. As a matter of fact, this is the first time in the seven years at IUSB that I received scores that were 9.0 or above on a 10.0 point scale (0.0 lowest/unfavorable and 10.0 highest/favorable). Most significantly and 51.6% (16/31) electronic response rate, I received a 9.5 for my instructor rating and a 9.25 for the course structure. In addition and most notably, in response to the question, “If a friend was going to take this course would you recommend this instructor?” I received a 9.75. I have never received a score this high on this question. I find this particularly exception, given that that the vast majority students of were not anthropology majors or minors and have never had me in previous classes. I will definitely be teaching this course again.