Poster presentation: Big History: From a History Course to a First Year Contextualization of the Whole Person

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Big History: From a History Course to a First Year Contextualization of the Whole Person
Presenter: Dr. Mojgan Behmand, Director of General Education and First Year Experience

Big History is a universal and transdisciplinary narrative that draws on astronomy, chemistry, biology, geology, anthropology, and sociology, and history, amongst other disciplines to tell the story of our universe. In the words of Big Historians Christian, Brown, Benjamin, it is “…a modern, scientific creation story… based on the best findings of modern science… a history that includes all human societies, and places their histories within the larger histories of the earth and the universe as a whole.”

Dominican University has understood its first year programming to be an opportunity for discovery of the self and the world. In fact, this program is a unique curricular and experiential expansion of the original Big History course as taught at other institutions across the globe. In this unique one-year course sequence, faculty and students become observers of the early solar system, researchers of evolutionary theory, analysts of fossil evidence from the past, examiners of human behavior and societal structures, and agents for the health of planet Earth and its inhabitants. Whatever a student’s major or interest, Dominican’s version of Big History offers a universal context for future learning and professional ambitions.

First Year Experience “Big History” is designed with engaged and experiential learning components, so students can make the most out of their college years. Co- and extra-curricular activities, such as the Stargazing Event, enhance classroom learning. Students study the evolution of hominids, their habitats, and societal systems; then, they examine a model skull of Australopithecus afarensis in our Hominid Skull Lab to look her in the eye socket. In addition, First Year Experience “Big History” incorporates lectures by renowned scientists and celebrated philosophers throughout the semester to complement students’ in-class studies. The essence of First Year Experience “Big History” is living content, designed to give students the relevant, applicable information they need to be informed and productive global citizens. To this end, the program equips students with the research, writing, and communication skills required for college and beyond.

Dominican University’s First Year Experience “Big History” Courses

Semester 1
FYE 1000: Big History: Nature and Culture from the Big Bang to the Present
FYE 1010: Writing Big History: Creative Writing
FYE 1020: Human Cultures and Political Systems through the Lens of Big History
FYE 1030: Trade through the Lens of Big History
FYE 1040: Philosophy through the Lens of Big History: Humanity’s Quest for Meaning
FYE 1050: Religion through the Lens of Big History: Homo sapiens and the Religious Experience
FYE 1060: Sex and Gender through the Lens of Big History
FYE 1070: Visualizing Big History: Art
FYE 1080: Visualizing Big History: Art
FYE 1090: Critical Thinking: Argumentation

Semester 2
FYE 1100: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1110: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1120: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1130: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1140: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1150: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1160: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1170: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1180: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1190: Visual History: Art and Its Commitment to Liberal Education
FYE 1200: Critical Thinking: Argumentation
FYE 1210: Critical Thinking: Argumentation
FYE 1220: Critical Thinking: Argumentation
FYE 1230: Critical Thinking: Argumentation
FYE 1240: Critical Thinking: Argumentation
FYE 1250: Critical Thinking: Argumentation
FYE 1260: Critical Thinking: Argumentation
FYE 1270: Critical Thinking: Argumentation
FYE 1280: Critical Thinking: Argumentation
FYE 1290: Critical Thinking: Argumentation

Big History 1000 Student Survey Aggregated Results
n=77, 33% of students

Rate your familiarity with appropriate methods of summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting

Rate your familiarity with appropriate methods of summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting

Rate your familiarity with the library and its resources BEFORE the Library Exercises.

Rate your familiarity with the library and its resources AFTER the Library Exercises.

Rate your familiarity with the library and its resources BEFORE the Library Exercises.

Rate your familiarity with the library and its resources AFTER the Library Exercises.

Assessment of Fall 2010 and Fall 2011 student themes, Writings Skills, and Research Skills

Those persons, whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue, should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens…

Thomas Jefferson