2012

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 Homonid Skull Lab to look for 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.

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**Faculty Training for Big History: An Annual Summer Institute**

Every summer, Dominican offers a summer institute for faculty across campus to learn Big History content and pedagogy. Attendees have come from disciplines as diverse as Art, Art History, Biology, Business, English, History, Humanities, Mathematics, Music, Occupational Therapy, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Religion, Social and Cultural Studies, Women and Gender Studies and expert guest speakers such as our resident Big Historian, Cynthia Brown, and Brian Swimme, Craig Benjamin, and Russell Caetlin have added their expertise. In summer 2012, the summer institute will be open to outside faculty. It will provide instructions in Big History content, but more importantly it will share best practices in pedagogy.

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**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 1000: Visual Art through the Lens of Big History  
FYE 1000: Human Cultures and Political Systems through the Lens of Big History  
FYE 1000: Myth and Mythos: the Lens of Big History  
FYE 1000: Trade through the Lens of Big History  
FYE 1000: Philosophy through the Lens of Big History: Humanity’s Quest for Meaning  
FYE 1000: Religion through the Lens of Big History: Homo sapiens and the Religious Experience  
FYE 1000: Sex and Gender: the Lens of Big History  
FYE 1000: Visualizing Big History: Art  
FYE 1000: Writing Big History: Creative Writing

**Semester 2**

FYE 1000: Big History: How the Universe Inhabitants  
FYE 1000: Evolution of Planets and Life on Earth  
FYE 1000: The Roots of Western Civilization  
FYE 1000: The Arab World  
FYE 1000: Imperialism  
FYE 1000: Industrial Revolution  
FYE 1000: World History: the World Today  
FYE 1000: The World of the Future

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**Big History 1000 Student Survey Aggregated Results**

**Rate your familiarity with appropriate methods of summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting BEFORE completing the Summary, Paraphrasing, and Quoting writing assignments.**

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**Assessment of Fall 2010 and Fall 2011 student theses.**

**WRITING SKILLS**

**INFORMATION LITERACY**

**PRESENTATION SKILLS**

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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 citizen …

Thomas Jefferson