

2-2012

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

Mojgan Behmand

Department of Literature and Languages, Dominican University of California,
mojgan.behmand@dominican.edu

Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Behmand, Mojgan, "Poster presentation: Big History: From a History Course to a First Year Contextualization of the Whole Person" (2012). *Collected Faculty and Staff Scholarship*. 36.
<https://scholar.dominican.edu/all-faculty/36>

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty and Staff Scholarship at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Collected Faculty and Staff Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact michael.pujals@dominican.edu.

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



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

First Year Experience “Big History”

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 planet Jupiter, its geography, and unique climate; then, they attend the Stargazing Event to witness the planet rise with its four glowing moons. Students study the evolution of hominids, their habitats, and societal systems; then, they examine a model skull of *Australopithecus afarensis* in our Hominoid 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 semesters 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 of California and Its Commitment to Liberal Education

Dominican University of California is an independent university of Catholic heritage located 12 miles north of San Francisco. Founded in 1890 by the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, Dominican has shifted from being a liberal arts college to a university with professional programs. Through various transitions, the University’s commitment to liberal education and the four Dominican pillars of study, reflection, community and service has remained strong. The definition of liberal education and its essential learning outcomes as articulated by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) have informed curricular reform at Dominican.

Program Description and Goals

First Year Experience “Big History” at Dominican University of California is a one-year program that takes students on an immense journey through time to witness the first moments of our universe, the birth of stars and planets, the formation of life on earth until the dawn of human consciousness, and the ever-unfolding story of humans as Earth’s dominant species. As the evolution of human cultures is studied, students engage with fundamental questions regarding the nature of the universe and our momentous role in shaping possible futures for our planet.

Program Goals

The Program is designed to promote:

- 1) recognition of the personal, communal, and political implications of the Big History story;
- 2) critical and creative thinking in a manner that awakens curiosity and enhances openness to multiple perspectives;
- 3) development of reading, thinking, and research skills to enhance one’s ability to evaluate and articulate one’s understanding of one’s place in the unfolding universe.

Dominican University’s Curricular Revision

In 2008, Dominican University of California undertook a revision of its General Education curriculum and created a first year program with content that was foundational, global, and suited to the challenges of the 21st century. The chosen content was Big History. The one-year sequence requires all freshmen to study Big History in a survey course and follow that with the choice of a second course that examines a discipline or field of inquiry through the lens of Big History. All courses are taught in small seminar format and emphasize both Big History content and the teaching of skills, such as writing and information literacy.

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

Semester 2

FYE 1100: Visual Art through the Lens of Big History

FYE 1200: Human Cultures and Political Systems through the Lens of Big History

FYE 1300: Myth and Metaphor through the Lens of Big History

FYE 1400: Trade through the Lens of Big History

FYE 1510: Philosophy through the Lens of Big History: Humanity’s Quest for Meaning

FYE 1520: Religion through the Lens of Big History: Homo sapiens and the Religious Experience

FYE 1600: Sex and Gender through the Lens of Big History

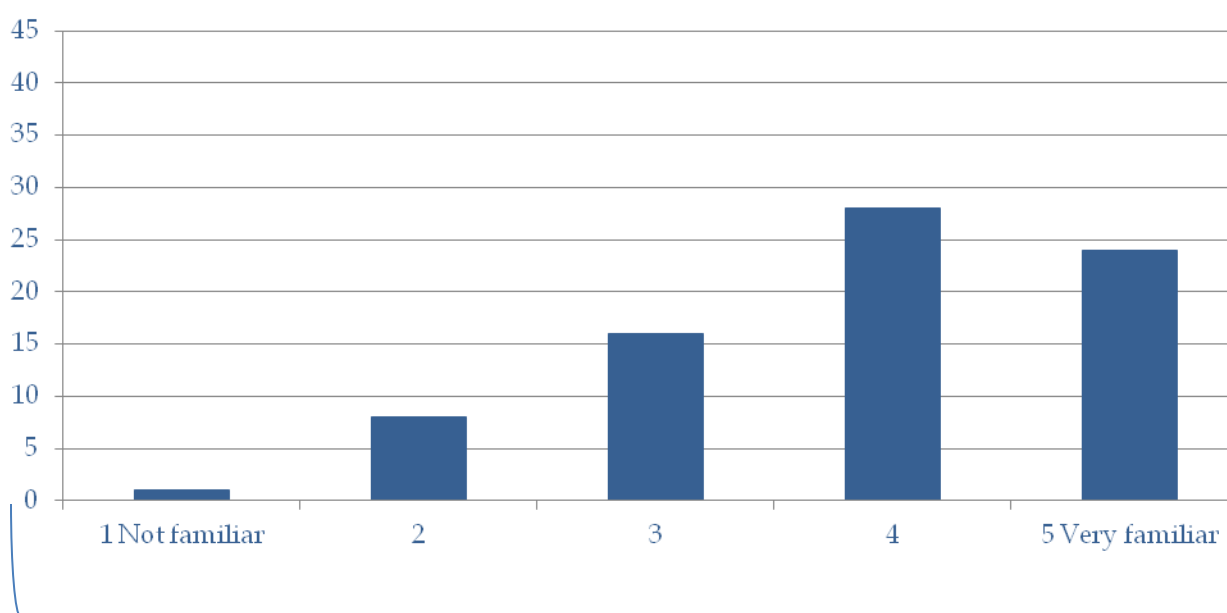
FYE 1900: Visualizing Big History: Art

FYE 1910: Writing Big History: Creative Writing

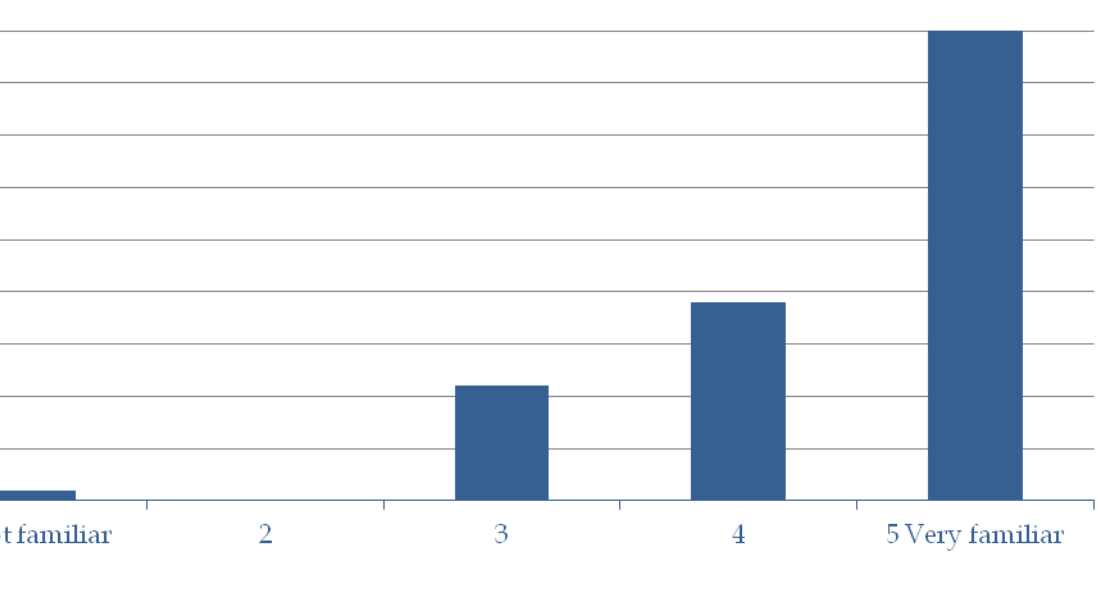


Big History 1000 Student Survey Aggregated Results n=77, 33% of students

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

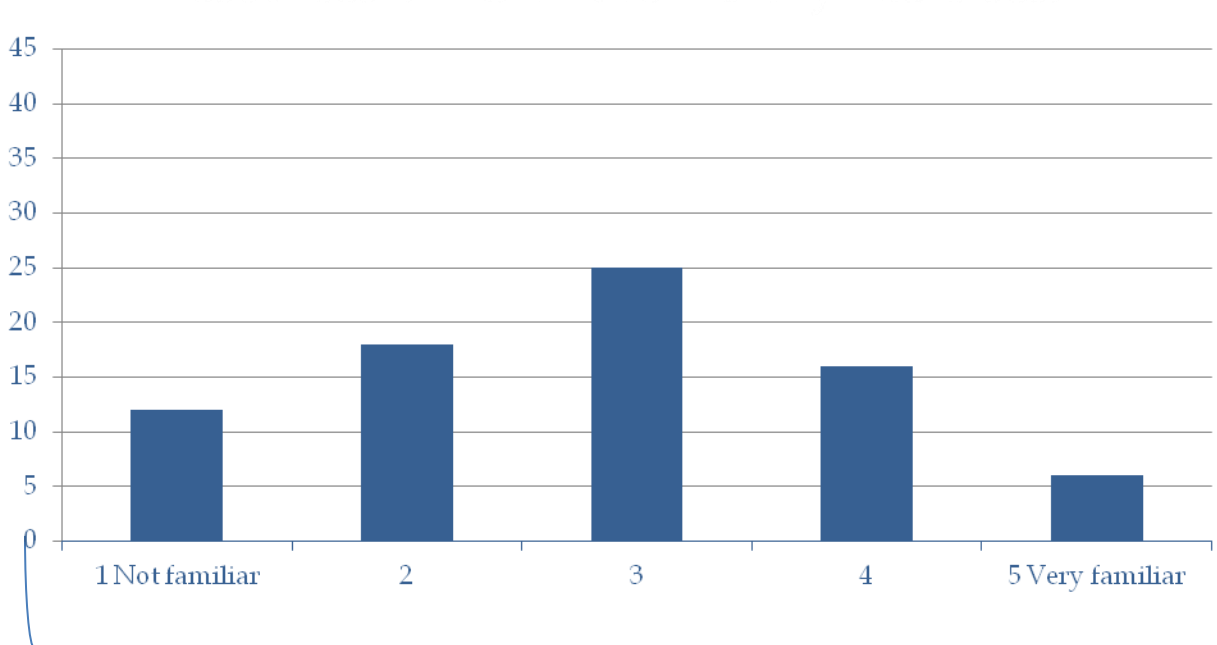


Rate your familiarity with appropriate methods of summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting AFTER completing the Summary, Paraphrasing, and Quoting writing assignments.

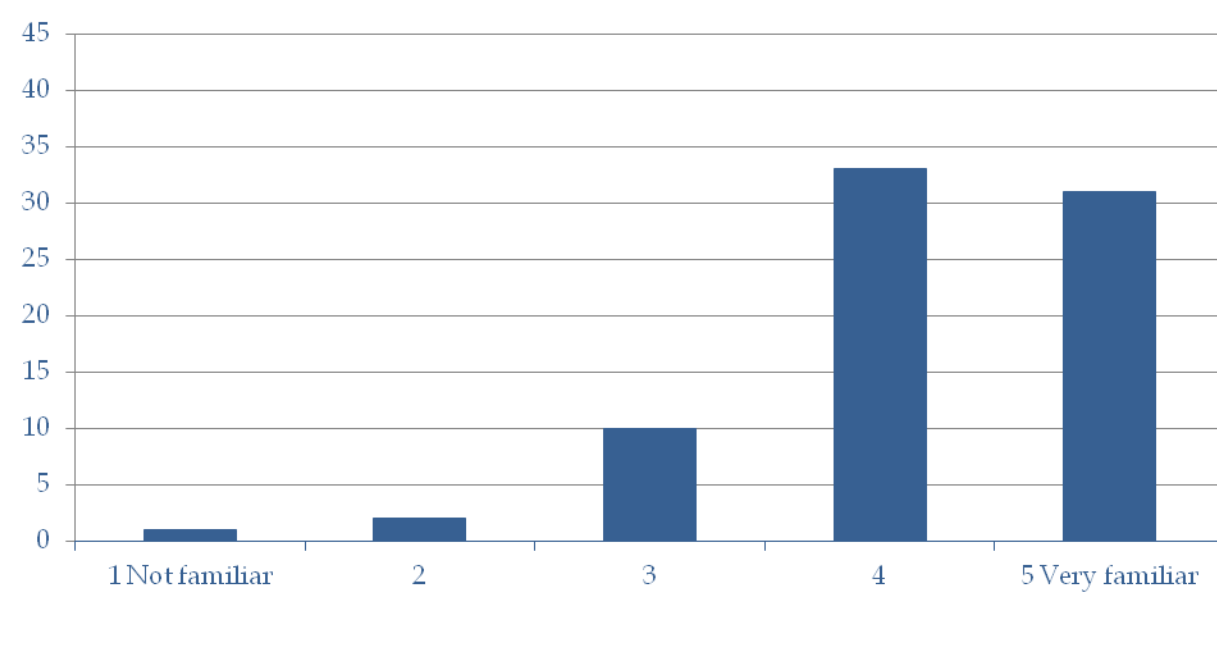


WRITING SKILLS

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

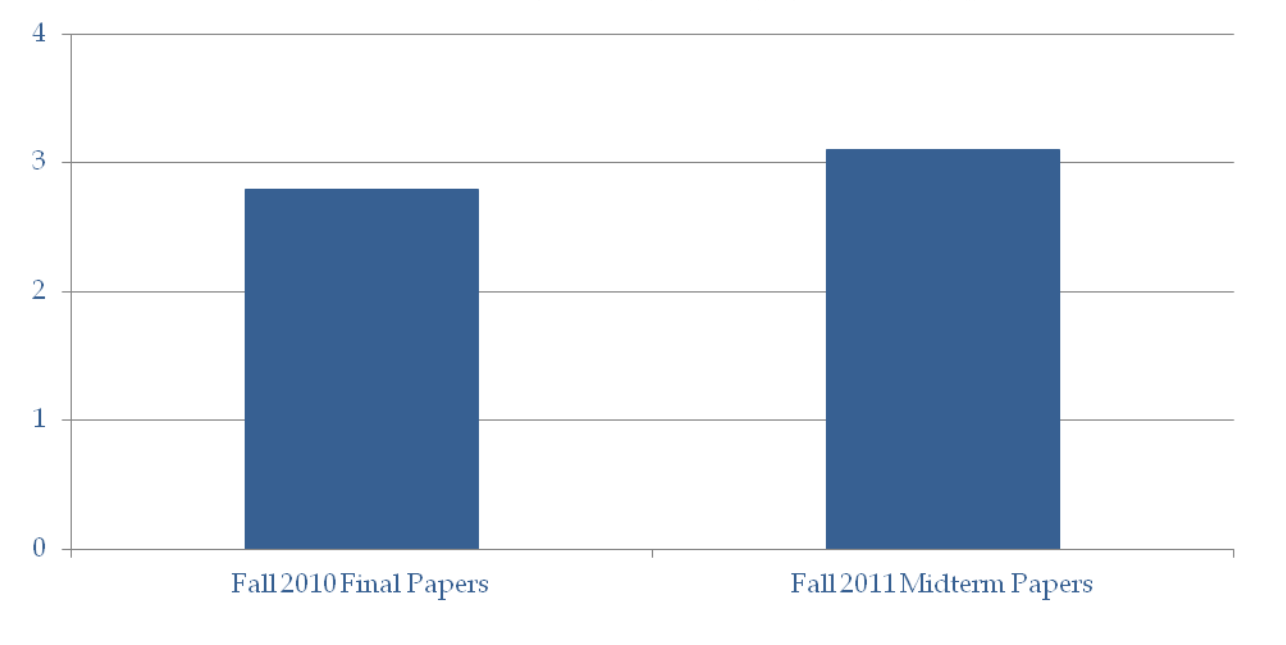


Rate your familiarity with the library and its resources AFTER the Library Exercises.



INFORMATION LITERACY

Assessment of Fall 2010 and Fall 2011 student theses.



WRITING SKILLS