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CLA Report

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CLA Final Project Report Dianne White Oyler April 29, 2009

The CLA performance task was applied to the History of Sub-Saharan Africa (HIST370). The seventeen students in the course were juniors and seniors; however, only one entered FSU as a freshman.

Students were asked to review eight documents and determine whether the desertification of the Sahara was caused by global warming or by man's activities on the land. The documents chosen included a definition of desertification from Enviro Facts; an NPR Study of the 6,000 years of a growing desert discussing the theories of a slow growing or modern, fast growing desert; A report from the Eden Foundation's study of the people living in the sahel in Niger; a map of aridity zones in Africa; a report from National Geographic News on the potential increase of rains caused by sunspot activity; a report on AFROL News of potential rains in the arid areas but not in southern Africa; and a report by the U.S. Department of State that projects drought in southern Africa and rains in the sahel. The documents included maps, charts, photos, line drawings, and narrative description. I tried to provide both official reports of the Eden Foundation, National Geographic, and U.S. Department of State and standard news through NPR and AFROL News. The documents were balanced by providing data on man's activities and those that discussed global warming; however, after carefully reading the documents, they were able to determine the nuance that the "global warming" in those documents was a result of man's activities. While there was no integrated quantitative data, the students were called upon to integrate information from charts, map, and line drawings among the documents with the narrative. Thus students had to thoroughly read the documents to reach the projected conclusion that it was man's activities on the land that was responsible for desertification. Fourteen of the sixteen taking the exam provided the correct answer while one chose the obvious but incorrect answer and one identified "global warming" as the answer then went on to discuss the correct answer in the text.

The exam was administered on February 15, 2009 and represents 15 percent of the grade putting it on par with the three exams whose percentage I reduced to accommodate the CLA. I have included the grade book page indicating the grades. The grades were based on the quality of the answer and the number of documents cited (since they were instructed to use all eight documents). It is unclear as to whether they read the documents but chose not to include them in the narrative. One weakness of students' responses was the omission of the map of aridity zones from their essays. Another is the fact that even though they had been instructed to use all of the documents some students did not. The strength in the essays was in understanding the problem and directly addressing the issues. Even the students who did not use all of the documents were able to assess the problem and to take the information from the documents they did use and come to the proper conclusion.

I will increase my usage of documents for student analysis in my courses. My recommendation to improve student performance on the CLA is to include more primary source materials for

analysis beginning at the freshman level. This will enable them to use a set of two to four documents to analyze and discuss the topic.

DOCUMENTATION

DOCUMENTA: http://www.bcb.uwc.ac.za/envfacts/facts/desertification.htm

DOCUMENT B: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90289718

DOCUMENT C: http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change-will-be-

catastrophe-for-africa-478375.html

DOCUMENT D: http://www.eden-foundation.org/project/desertif.html

DOCUMENT E: http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/aridity_zones

DOCUMENT F: http://www.afrol.com/articles/15040

DOCUMENT G: http://www.afrol.com/articles/15040

DOCUMENT H: http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EGUA-

6CPRMK?OpenDocument