**General Education Annual Course Assessment Form**

Course Number/Title: Philosophy 57  
GE Area: A3

Results reported for AY 2014-1015  
# of sections: 14  
# of instructors: 10

Course Coordinator: Anand Vaidya  
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Department Chair: Janet Stemwedel  
College: Humanities and Arts

**Instructions:** Each year, the department will prepare a brief (two page maximum) report that documents the assessment of the course during the year. This report will be electronically submitted to <curriculum@sjsu.edu>, by the department chair, to the Office of Undergraduate Studies, with an electronic copy to the home college by October 1 of the following academic year.

**Part 1**

To be completed by the course coordinator:

(1) What SLO(s) were assessed for the course during the AY?

In the spring term of AY 14-15 the philosophy department, under the coordination of Dr. Vaidya, evaluated how students were performing on SLO 1 of area A3, in the department’s Logic and Critical Reasoning course. The following instructors, teaching one or more sections were involved:

Ronald Allen (2)  
Phillip Elliott (2)  
Bo Mou (2)  
Tony Nguyen (2)  
Nathan Osborne  
Lucien Pino  
Rick Tiezsen  
Anand Vaidya  
Steve Yahn  
Kyle Yrigoyen

The evaluation was done on:

SLO 1: Locate and evaluate sources, through library research, and integrate research through appropriate citation and quotation.

All sections of 57 have at least one assignment that requires students to locate and evaluate sources through library research either online or at the library. These papers require that students use quotations and evaluate sources. The most common assignment is a short critical paper on a topic of social justice.
Methods and Results:

In AY 14-15 Dr. Vaidya met with several of the instructors to discuss general problems instructors were facing in teaching logic and critical thinking. Attention was obviously given to asking questions about SLO 1 since it was the learning objective to be evaluated. The primary problem instructors reported is that while students do not have problems doing research or integrating sources into a work, they have a big problem with identifying what counts as a legitimate source or how to evaluate the credibility of a source. Many instructors found that students would cite Wikipedia or some online journal, blog, or news source. Often times the core complaint was put in the phrase, “they just cite whatever confirms their beliefs that they find online.” Overall the group was not happy with the discussion. We felt a lot more attention needs to be put on teaching student’s how to identify a source that is credible and legitimate for the purposes of a critical paper they are writing.

Plan:

The future plan involves two major changes. First, Dr. Vaidya is going to write a short manual / guide to doing research on the net for the purposes of writing a critical paper in a philosophy class, such as logic and critical thinking. The short guide will be made available to all instructors. However, there are other sources already available that instructors can use, and these will be discussed in the upcoming academic year as an instrument for combatting the problem. Second, we will implement a test question in one exam of three instructors to test how proficient students are at identifying whether a certain source is legitimate for a given type of critical writing assignment.

Part 2

To be completed by the department chair (with input from course coordinator as appropriate):

(4) Are all sections of the course still aligned with the area Goals, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), Content, Support, and Assessment? If they are not, what actions are planned?

Yes all sections of the course are still aligned with the area Goals, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), Content, Support, and Assessment. Instructors regularly meet with the course coordinator – Janet Stemwedel

(5) If this course is in a GE Area with a stated enrollment limit (Areas A1, A2, A3, C2, D1, R, S, V, & Z), please indicate how oral presentations will be evaluated with larger sections (Area A1), or how practice and revisions in writing will be addressed with larger sections, particularly how students are receiving thorough feedback on the writing which accounts for the minimum word count in this GE category (Areas A2, A3, C2, D1, R, S, V, & Z) and, for the writing intensive courses (A2, A3, and Z), documentation that the students are meeting the GE SLOs for writing.

Students receive feedback on essays through three techniques. First, read outlines of essays. Second, instructors and students engage in peer review of papers. Third, instructors read drafts of papers and offer comments before final drafts are submitted. Fourth, instructors provide comments on final drafts of papers.
Explanation of Practices Used in Teaching Sections of PHIL 57 Exceeding GE Enrollment Limits, Response to Memo Sent by UGS Office

Date: November 13, 2015

In fall of 2014 Philosophy 57 had 7 sections with approximately 15 students over the limit. Philosophy 57 is a writing intensive and logic intensive critical thinking course focused on techniques of formal and informal reasoning coupled with practice in executing these skills in the context of written work. All faculty give writing assignments and exams that involve short essay (less than a page), medium (2 to 3 pages), or longer length (4-6 pages) essays. Students are required to outline their essays, rewrite papers for a better grade, and to peer review their papers. Many students, depending on the instructor, have the option to revise papers in light of comments both before they submit a draft and even after they submit the final draft. The philosophy department strongly believes that students should revise and revise again to improve their writing based on guidance and feedback. Students are asked to meet with ISAs for further help; ISAs are trained by the faculty members in best practices for grading and guiding written work. Faculty often go over ISA work themselves to keep an eye on quality, and provide additional comments in the process.

In all classes the faculty involved require the requisite number of words in written work from their students, they write extensive comments on papers, and provide sufficient time before the end of the semester for students to benefit from the comments. It is not uncommon for instructors to spend one or more days, per writing assignment, in class reviewing individual essays or having peer review with supervision. Grading always means providing written feedback or meeting with the students to orally discuss their work. It should be noted that even our large classes are interactive and allow plenty of room for student involvement and class discussion, both in Socratic dialogue with instructor and based on small group work in class. Frequently the instructors provide feedback in the class by holding up examples of student work as models or by raising writing issues of general concern. There is often class discussion of student answers to exam and other questions. In addition, it is departmental policy that students be made aware of our “Guidelines on Writing Papers in Philosophy,” a shared set of guidelines made available on our department website. Instructors of larger classes as well as the GE coordinator for PHIL 57 compare assessment results with those in small sections to see whether there are discrepancies that need to be addressed.

Finally, we have a former office room set aside as a Writing Center, which is staffed by ISAs for three days a week with the sole function of providing students who come in with feedback on writing. This is a supplement to faculty office hours, which themselves are devoted to providing writing feedback among other things.