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 AY 17-18 Professor Vaidya coordinated the assessment of Logic and Critical Thinking SLO 4: Identify and critically evaluate the assumptions in the context of an argument. All instructors met with Professor Vaidya to discuss how they assessed SLO4 and what results they got. This information led to a discussion of how instruction could be improved.

(2) What were the results of the assessment of this course? What were the lessons learned from the assessment?

All sections used a test instrument, such as a short reading or an argument for analysis. Some instructors also provided students with an evaluation rubric, such as a flow chart, for ranking the quality of an argument, such as through validity and soundness. Across all sections at least 60% of the students passed SLO4. Some courses had better performance than others. This is to be expected due to the different materials used and the nature of the instruction.

(3) What modifications to the course, or its assessment activities or schedule, are planned for the upcoming year? (If no modifications are planned, the course coordinator should indicate this.)

For the upcoming year all instructors have agreed to engage in a mini course on epistemology within critical thinking to help improve on argument evaluation. One of the key areas targeted for improvement is identification of truth through sources. It seems as if students have a hard time evaluating or determining how to assess the truth of a claim when the claim is not obviously verifiable. Basic epistemology should help students figure out how to question truth and look for relevant ways to assess truth. Given that an argument is sound when it is valid and has true premises, it is important for students to know how to assesses validity as well as truth.
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, Janet Stemwedel, Chair, Department of Philosophy

(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.

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 (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 Instructional Student Assistants 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. 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. Traditionally, the Writing Center has been used largely by students in Phil 57 classes. Currently we have five student ISAs working in the Writing Center. This is a supplement to faculty office hours, which themselves are devoted to providing writing feedback among other things. In addition, faculty with high overall teaching load are assigned a personal ISA (a “Grading Assistant”) to help with grading.

In all classes the faculty involved require the requisite number of words for A3 courses 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 larger classes are interactive and allow plenty of room for student involvement and class discussion, both in Socratic dialogue with the 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 coordinators for those courses compare assessment results with those in small sections to see whether there are discrepancies that need to be addressed.