Part 1
To be completed by the course coordinator:

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

We assessed SLO 2: “Letters courses will enable students to respond to significant works by writing both research-based critical analyses and personal responses.” We are in agreement that an introductory level philosophy course should assess the extent to which students are capable of engaging philosophy’s great texts and writing research-based papers that reflect the depth of engagement.

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

Requirements varied from section to section, and semester to semester. However, all sections required at least 1 research-based paper to be written by the end of the semester. In some cases (Rubio, section 8), students were required to analyze a contemporary social/ethical problem using the theories and methods of one significant philosopher. Fern Alberts (section 3) reports: “The primary research-based component of this course was a 8 page minimum application paper in which the student was to apply a philosophical idea or theory which had been covered in the course readings and lecture. This assignment required that the student research the dimensions of a contemporary social problem, such as homelessness. The student was then to apply a philosophical idea or theory to the problem and show how this application could illuminate differently or lead to its solution. The intention of this assignment was that students be able to ground their appreciation of enduring human concerns in contemporary problems and not merely through reading texts.” In other cases (Bashaw, section 4) students were expected to focus on a particular figure and analyze the most important contributions of that figure to the history of philosophy; while in other cases (Guillon, section 1) students were expected to turn in more than one research-based analysis of a philosophical theory throughout the semester.

In 10 of the 17 sections, students were required to turn in a Rough Draft of the report, so as to receive feedback on content and structure. The majority of students were not familiar with the process of researching a major paper. In the Rough Draft phase, instructors report that about 90% of students did not know how to properly cite sources, paraphrase, or provide meaningful analysis.
The final research papers showed significant improvement. By the end of the semester, about 80% of the students were able to properly cite sources, paraphrase and provide meaningful analysis. Moreover, 80% of submissions critically engaged with significant works and demonstrated an ability to interpret and analyze the main tenets of the tradition they were treating. While these papers varied in grades and quality, it was clear that the students had become familiar, and were comfortable with, writing research-based papers.

Michael Rubio provides an example of his evaluation: “Of the 42 students who turned in the research paper at the end of the semester I measured the following changes in comprehension and writing: 36 students showed both strong comprehension and application of philosophic ideas as compared with their knowledge at the mid-way point in the semester. These students received scores of 85 to 100 pts. The remaining 6 students scored from 75 to 85 pts. The primary determinants of their scores when low were inability to use philosophic ideas in analysis of contemporary social problems and lack of research to back up their claims. This course approached the introduction to philosophy from a cross-cultural perspective with students exposed to the ideas and positions of Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Kant, Mill, Locke, Gandhi, and ancient Buddhist and Hindu schools of thought, amongst others. As might be assumed, many students took a political approach to looking at the social problems of racism, sexism, transgender discrimination, animal rights, and global warming. These students employed the ethical and political ideas of utilitarianism, deontological ethics, and Confucian ethics, amongst others, to analyze contemporary social problems. Evaluation of the final paper testified that almost all students had attained a deep understanding of the core ideas of the philosophers employed. The research component allowed the students to apply these philosophic ideas to real world concerns and, thereby, form a bridge showing the link between the enduring human concerns of ancient and modern philosophers with contemporary problems relevant to students.”

(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.)

Instructors agreed that the course itself should not be modified, that we are teaching the right things and going about it in the right way. However, we decided that the next time we assess SLO 2 a more uniform metric will be used at the start of the semester to measure improvement.

Part 2
To be completed by the department chair (with input from course coordinator as appropriate):

(3) 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

(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.
The typical size for this class is 45, the GE limit is given as 40. The typical class then is 12.5 per cent above the GE limit. This does not pose a problem for getting sufficient feedback. The instructor of record provides feedback and grades all writing assignments and welcomes, if not requires, first drafts of all writing assignments and provides feedback on drafts. If sections are exceptionally oversized they are graded by the instructor of record with the assistance of an Instructional Student Assistant (ISA). The ISA must be approved both by the Instructional Assistant Coordinator and the Philosophy Department Chair for their excellence in both composition and their expertise in the field of philosophy at issue. Whenever an ISA aids in the grading of a large course, s/he provides feedback along with grading. In all cases, when the help of an ISA is employed, the instructor of record must explicitly notify the students of the class that some writing assignments have been graded and feedback has been provided by an ISA. If a student is unhappy with an ISA grade the instructor of record will rereads the paper, provide additional feedback, and regrade the assignment (if that is warranted.) Generally speaking, any instructor who is teaching more than 100 GE students in a semester receives ISA help.