General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: Philosophy 61: Moral Issues  
GE Area: C2

Results reported for AY 2015-2016  # of sections: 12  # of instructors: 8

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Department Chair: Janet Stemwedel  
College: H & A

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, by the department chair, to the Office of Undergraduate Studies, with an electronic copy to the home college by September 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?

SLO 1: “Letters courses will enable students to respond to significant works by writing both research-based critical analyses and personal responses.” In this course, students engage contemporary moral issues using moral/ethical theories presented in class. Students are expected to apply these theories in research-based analyses that showcase insight into the issue in question and engagement with a historically important moral theory. Instructors can assign one or several papers in which students take a position on the issue and present their argument, which itself must be cogent and valid. The paper requires students to engage in library or online database research and the final version of the paper must include at least five sources. The final version of the papers is heavily scrutinized for clarity and originality.

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

The majority of instructors for this course evaluated this SLO with a final research paper. Michael Jordan, Lisa Bernasconi, Rita Manning, and Tommy Lott required a research-based analysis of a contemporary moral issue that was well-researched (5-8 sources) and well written; Nathan Osborne asked his students to “explore a contemporary ethical quandary and utilize at least one of the thinkers we have studied to come to a conclusion about how to solve/approach it.” These papers were then graded and returned.

In measuring attainment of the SLO, instructors consider: (1) students’ understanding of the moral issue(s) in question, (2) their understanding of competing ethical or philosophical approaches to that issue, and (3) their argumentative skill in assessing those approaches and arguing for their own position, (4) their ability to apply secondary source material to their personal analysis, and (5) a measured improvement over non-researched based in-class writing assignments written at the beginning of the school year. Evaluation of the papers showed that over 80% of students had a clear understanding of the basic principles of the moral theories which they chose to examine; over 60% could compare and contrast different theories; 80% could clearly and articulately assess the theories considered; and a little under 60% could apply secondary source material to their personal analysis. What was clear, however, was that by the end of the semester over 90% of students who had turned in their papers have achieved a more greater familiarity with the ethical theory that they
had chosen to consider and a less prejudiced understanding of the moral issue with which they engaged. Papers written at the start of the semester, in contrast to the end-of-semester assignment, revealed a superficial understanding of both the theory and the issue—less than 30% of students could name or explain a theory and less than 30% could properly explain the moral issue. But for most students the research-based paper at the end reveals a more informed understanding of significant works in moral theory.

(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.)

There are not planned medications for the evaluation of this SLO. Writing research-based papers in philosophy courses is standard and so is evaluating these for clarity, originality, and rigorous scholarship.

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?

(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.

Enrollment limit for C2 is 40. 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.