General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: Philosophy 10: Introduction to Philosophy       GE Area: C2

Results reported for AY 2016-2017     # of sections: 13      # of instructors: 8

Course Coordinator: Carlos Sanchez   E-mail: carlos.sanchez@sjsu.edu

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 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?

We assessed SLO 3: “Letters courses will enable students to write clearly and effectively. Writing shall be assessed for correctness, clarity, and conciseness.”

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

We believe an introductory level philosophy course should assess the extent to which students are capable of expressing themselves in writing, to write clearly, to be accurate, and to avoid excess verbiage.

Requirements varied from section to section, and semester to semester. While some sections required at least one research-based paper to be written by the end of the semester, others required students to write multiple essays throughout the semester, assessing for correctness, clarity, and conciseness in each case. In Dan Williamson’s course, two papers were due. “The first shorter paper (3-4 pages typed) aims to prepare the student to do more of the same for the longer essay. Topics range from Plato's Cave to Aristotle's account of substance or the stages of doubt in Descartes first two meditations. The student is provided with written (typed) comments and a grade from the instructor. This prepares them for the final paper due the day of the final exam, also typed in appropriate college format. The final paper has a minimum of 5 pages and must have research and the appropriate use of bibliographic referencing. The topics, again, cover ideas and movements such as Existentialism, Kant's Transcendental Deduction, and concepts of gender and identity.” In Fern Alberts’ course, student writing is assessed both in papers assigned specifically for that aim and in written exams given in the middle and the end of the course. In other cases (Bashaw) students were expected to focus on a particular theme or figure and analyze the most important contributions of that figure to the history of philosophy; while in other cases (Burnett) students were expected to turn in more than one research-based analysis of a philosophical theory. In Tommy Lott’s case, the lesson learned at the end of the semester in regards to clear and effective writing was that encouraging students to write throughout the semester, whether in short pieces (essay questions) or longer ones (term papers) makes students more comfortable and more willing to engage texts in a critical and effective way.
In 8 of the 13 sections, students were required to turn in a rough draft of the report, so as to receive feedback on clarity and substance. In general, students are initially unprepared to engage texts in writing. As Alberts writes: “their ability to analytically articulate the topic is usually very weak, at the beginning of the semester. Continual use of [writing exercises] usually proves beneficial in improving their ability to think critically about these issues.” Instructors report that about 90% of students did not know how to properly cite sources, paraphrase, or provide meaningful analysis. Toward the end of the semester, students show significant improvement. By the end of the semester, about 85% of the students are able to properly cite sources, paraphrase and provide meaningful analysis in a clear and coherent way. Together, instructors report that of the 80% of students who engaged in continual writing practice, more than 70% showed significant improvement in their final writing assignments.

(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 3 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 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 reread 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.