General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

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

Results reported for AY 2017-2018    # of sections: 15    # of instructors: 10

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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?

We assessed SLO 1: “Letters courses will enable students to recognize how significant works illuminate enduring human concerns.” We are in agreement that an introductory level philosophy course should assess the extent to which students are exposed to the significant works that illuminate enduring human concerns.

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

Assessments for this SLO varied from section to section and semester to semester: preliminary exams and writing prompts evaluate the student’s initial knowledge of the topic and post-tests (midterms, finals, writing exercises) evaluate student learning. For example, in Anand Vaidya’s class, an initial pre-test measured what the students knew before lectures and subsequently all of his writing assignments and the midterm ethics exam contributed to evaluate progress. Both pre and post-tests asked students to evaluate contemporary moral issues using rights based and consequence based ethics. Both forms of ethical analysis were based on classical philosophers such as Kant, Mill, and recent feminist ethicists. A similar assessment technique was used by Kupra Patel, where she used three writing assignments to measure the student’s ability to articulate enduring human concerns before and after exposure to the classic texts in the history of philosophy, while Fern Alberts used a simple quiz at the beginning and measured gained knowledge with written responses toward the end of the semester.

10 of the 15 sections reported requiring a first-week pretest, either in the form of a written response paper or a quiz. The results were about uniform throughout all sections: In Vaidya’s class, there was an initial 90% failure rate; by the time of the midterm, 70% passed, while 30% failed. However, over 50% showed an inability to apply moral principles to novel cases using ethical theory. Vaidya concludes that pre- and post-assessments reveal that 80% of students need improvement in core critical thinking skills. In Patel’s class, the numbers were similar: after an initial failure rate of about 90%, at the end of the course about 80% of the student were able to properly identify the human concern and apply a historical perspective; while Patel agrees with Vaidya that most students need help with critical thinking, she also point to the fact that over 15% of students need writing assistance as well.
Overall, all sections report significant improvement from the beginning to the end of the semester: on average, there is an 80% improvement rate in identifying significant issues of human concern and articulating a proper perspective. The total number of students was approximately 644.

(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, it was decided that more time would be spent on teaching basic critical thinking skills and on in-class writing as the semester progresses.

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: Prof. Stemwedel, Chairperson

(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 GELOs 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.