General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

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

Results reported for AY 2017-18  
# of sections: 16  
# of instructors: 9

Course Coordinator: Carlos Sanchez  
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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: “recognize how significant works illuminate enduring human concerns.” In studying various moral issues, both theoretical and practical, students in the course read important works by both contemporary philosophers and great historical figures, such as, Aristotle, Kant, and Mill, and respond to them through homework assignments, journal entries, or written in-class exercises and through argumentative research papers. In the latter, they are required to explain clearly the issues at stake, to show an understanding of the arguments or philosophical approach of the writers they are discussing, and to assess those arguments and defend their own position.

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

To assess this SLO, at the beginning of the semester students are asked to write about some moral problem they encountered in their own life and to describe the reasoning they used in dealing with it. These ungraded exercises are saved by the instructor and compared at the end of the term with the student’s final writing assignment.

At the end of the term, or toward the end of the term, students are assessed on their improvement. A good paper (of about 5 pages) would be able to explain one or two theories that was covered in class. The explanation should be competent and effectively use quoted (and appropriately referenced) text.

In measuring attainment of the SLO, instructors consider: (1) students’ understanding of the moral issue in question, (2) their understanding of competing ethical or philosophical approaches to that issue, and (2) their argumentative skill in assessing those approaches and arguing for their own position. Our results correspond with previous assessment exercises. Student improved quite dramatically across the semester. Whereas before they had some trouble even identifying a moral issue and few were able to produce reasons or arguments for their moral judgments or decisions, by the end of the semester most of them were able to use the concepts they had acquired from the philosophers they had read to develop and defend own views.
Almost all of the sections report significant improvement from initial to later assessments. Karin Brown reports that only 10% of her students failed to get a passing grade, while Williamson reports less than an 8% failure rate.

(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.)

The assessment results were favorable, showing that students made significant improvement in writing and in their understanding of, and engagement with, significant texts. The results do not indicate any obvious way to improve the course; variations in results did not correlate with any differences in reading selections or writing assignments among different instructors. So, we plan no modifications in the course or in its assessment. However, the instructors will continue to mentor each other and to meet to discuss various pedagogical issues in the course.

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. Janet Stemwedel, 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 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.