General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: Philosophy 70B: Modern Philosophy

GE Area: C2

Results reported for AY 2017-2018

# of sections: 2

# of instructors: 2

Course Coordinator: James Lindahl

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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 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?

SLO 1: Letters courses will enable students to recognize how significant works illuminate enduring human concerns.

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

Both course content and assignments have been modified in recent semesters to make the issues pertaining to the illumination of enduring human concerns more accessible to students and more relevant to their everyday concerns. Rather than focusing on the traditional philosophical movements of the modern period: Rationalism and Empiricism, material has been selected to focus on social movements and social change in the modern period as well as the philosophical works that have a clear influence on today’s social and cultural values. Topics include the development of conflicts between science and religion following the Scientific Revolution, political philosophy with special attention to the role of government in establishing and protecting human rights, the role of government in economy, and the development of ideas concerning racial and gender equality and inequality. I have expanded a section that focuses on matters of cultural and media influence and difficulties discerning truth from propaganda (or fake news).

While these subjects in course material seem to better engage the interest of students, assessment of their comprehension of how these works illuminate enduring human concerns is done through class discussions, essays, and test questions.

Essay topics include:

Essay 1
Explore Francis Bacon’s Four Idols. What are they? Why is he worried about them? How do we avoid them? Should we still worry about them today?

Essay 2
Compare the moral philosophies of Kant and Bentham. How does each propose deciding which acts are right and which are wrong? How might these moral theories be applied to moral debates taking place today?

In both cases, students are required to analyze the original works and then relate key issues to matters
that concern us today.

Test questions include:

5. What, according to Rousseau, is the root cause of inequality? How do inequalities develop according to the cause he cites?

7. What new ideas or theories developed during the Enlightenment contributed to the construction of the idea of racial inequality?

8. What, specifically, does Mary Wollstonecraft say is the mistake in Rousseau’s thinking about women and why does she insist that his views are so harmful to women?

By making the essays explicitly require students to connect course material to modern issues, these connections become the focal point of writing assignments. The three test questions above are drawn directly from the midterm or the final exam. Including questions that directly require making those connections allows me to assess student understanding of these issues. In all of discussion, essays, and exams, students demonstrate that reflecting on these issues is the most interesting part of the course material. As such, they tend to grasp and retain the material much better when material which illuminates enduring human concerns is the main focus.

(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)

I am changing the research requirements on the writing assignments. I am increasingly concerned that students seem more inclined to rely on secondary sources rather than cite the primary works. I am making two changes to address this. I will limit the reliance on secondary sources while requiring the students to engage the primary material, at greater length in their writing assignments. Second, I will discourage the third person (objective) perspective and require them to include more first-person analysis. I believe this will further motivate them to connect the material to issues they are personally interested in. This will encourage them to more directly connect the philosophical issues addressed in 17th-18th c. philosophy to the real issues that they think about every day.

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: Janet Stemwedel, Chair, 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.