General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title  Phil 12: Philosophy of the Person       GE Area  E

Results reported for AY_2016–17   # of sections: 5       # of instructors: 3 (Osborne, Williamson, Korsund)

Course Coordinator: Karin Brown       E-mail: karin.brown@sjsu.edu

Department Chair: Janet Stemwedel       College: Humanities and the Arts

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 3: Students will be able to use appropriate social skills to enhance learning and develop positive interpersonal relationships with diverse groups and individuals.

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

This is accomplished in two ways in this course, 1) by taking advantage of the diversity found in the classroom, given that SJSU has no ethnic majority, and 2) through debating the ideas found in Ifeanyi Anthony Menkiti’s essay Person and Community in African Traditional Thought, which calls into question the traditional Western emphasis on individuality and personal freedom as defining features of a ‘person’ rather than by emphasizing one’s role within a community, or the degree to which one meets certain social criteria.

One of the more important philosophical questions addressed in this course is: What does it mean to be an “I” as the dynamic intersection of social identifiers when it comes to ability, age, gender, and sexual orientation, as well as differing spiritual, socio-economic, and ethnic/linguistic/racial backgrounds? In other words, what is it to be someone with unique goals, values, aptitudes, interests and experiences within the context of a larger, more diverse community? The course addresses this question, and others, from various philosophical perspectives in an effort to prompt students to critically assess and develop their own notions about personhood and what defines them as a person in a community with many different ideas about the subject. The final goal is to weave together strands of rational and emotive thought so that students may integrate knowledge they believe to be personally important with knowledge that they have learned is valued by others.

Prof. Korsund writes that “In meeting this goal, and the criteria set forth by SLO 3, I seek to take advantage of the diversity found in the classroom here at SJSU, while debating the definition of a person. Should a person be defined in terms of personal freedom and individuality or in terms of social responsibility to and role within a larger community? With this in mind, I encourage open and meaningful discussion by facilitating a forum for constructive debate regarding this question. This is accomplished by requiring students to participate in classroom discussion in some meaningful way— e.g., by offering a significant question, a substantial answer,
an insight about the reading, and/or a summarization or review of key concepts. I encourage this first by defining classroom etiquette for discussion, so that students will feel comfortable to speak, and second by allowing students to self-assess their class participation points based on how well they think they participated in the class discussion each day. At the end of the week, I reserve the right to reassess the student’s self-awarded participation points, and in this way hold students accountable for accurate self-assessment. Participation in classroom discussions account for 15% of the student’s overall grade in the course. Classroom discussion and community etiquette implements the following values as listed in the course syllabus: (1) Be respectful and kind to others; (2) have the courage to speak up; (3) no interrupting others while speaking; (4) do the readings before class, (5) be present not only physically, but mentally; (6) no web surfing, checking email, or texting during class; (7) no tolerance for intolerance.”

Professor Osborne writes: “In Philosophy 12 I run most of the class in a Seminar style, and frequently implement group work in which the students are randomly assigned into small groups of 4 or 5. One group work revolves around analyzing an article about Misogyny and Entitlement in "Nerd Culture." Students give their own unique perspectives on the validity of the article in their small groups that we then discuss after outlining the authors main points. Near the end of class we take a step back and see how the author’s commentary is not unique just to "Nerd" subculture, but is a prevailing theme in the greater American culture.”

Dan Williamson writes “Assessment Activity: Group Work. The basic “job” for this ….was a group presentation. Everyone in the class had to do one. Some of the presentations were weak, but in the main competent. But in fact the real development of interpersonal skills across gender, race and class was in the bi-weekly class meetings. I couldn’t have asked for a better class. First, it was a nice mix of straight and gay with one individual transitioning in gender. There was no hostility and it was very open. I had a Muslim-American young man who defied just about every stereotype you could imagine, a vivacious and charming African-American young lady, several outspoken (in a positive way) Caucasian individuals, several Asians and Hispanics; and one Vietnamese Marine recruit who was a hard working and studious young person. The Rainbow flag was everywhere apparent. Nearly everyone was talkative. I learned quite a bit and I know for certain that everyone else did as well. This “came out” (as it were) while discussing gender assignments, cultural construction and essentialism, in the context of Foucault’s work on sexuality. The discussions were lively and informative for all. It is hard to systematize such a sensibility in quantitative language, but it is certain that it improved their abilities at interpersonal relationships within a very diverse setting. No hostility, just an openness to learn. Wonderful class and one that I shall gladly recall over the years left to me.”

(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.)

No modifications are planned.

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