General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

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

Results reported for AY 2014-2015  
# of sections: 16  
# of instructors: 9

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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 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 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?

Requirements varied from section to section, and semester to semester. However, all sections required at least 1 research-based critical analysis and as many as 15 critical, written, responses. The first few (2-3) personal responses serve as a preliminary evaluation of student writing, while a final research-based paper serves as a post-test, or indication of progress/failure.

8 of the 16 sections reported requiring a first-week response paper. The majority of students were not familiar with the history of philosophy. About 70% did not understand the difference between philosophy and psychology.

The final response papers revealed a significant improvement. By the end of the semester, about 85% of the students were able to properly identify key difference between philosophy and other disciplines as well as engage classic texts. The final, research-based papers were the best indication of this: 80% of students who submitted theses papers critically engaged significant works and demonstrated an ability to interpret and analyze the main tenets of the tradition they were treating. While these papers varied in grades and quality, it was clear that the students were aware of their task.

As an example, Professor Leddy reports “To ensure that the course dealt with enduring human concerns I stressed connections between classical and contemporary texts. Students read Plato, Five Dialogues, Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations on 1st Philosophy, Alva Noë, Out of Our Heads, a contemporary approach to philosophy of mind critical of exclusively neuroscientific
approaches, Cynthia Freeland, *But is it Art?* an introduction to contemporary issues in aesthetics, and Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness,* a Buddhist philosophy of life, and Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations,* a Stoic classic. Students wrote three short essay quizzes, three homework assignments of two pages, a term paper of six pages, an essay style final exam, and several in-class writing exercises. Students got a choice between two essay questions on the final exam, one involving applying the materials in the readings to the question “who am I” and the other to “what is art?” About 40% of the students got a C+ or less on the first quiz (his version of the first response paper). By the final exam only four grades were below a B. I found that the students benefitted a lot from materials that directly related to their lives: the Noe, Freeland, Hanh, and Aurelius texts got the best response, but the Plato after the Apology was tough going and the Descartes was the hardest to teach. The next time I teach the class I will cut down on the Plato and Descartes readings and enhance more relatable material. Students were required to do classroom presentations: I found these to be more problematic than the classic term papers as far as addressing enduring human concerns went. I have to find a way to get students to take presentations more seriously or reduce it from a requirement to an option. However, I enjoyed this class and was particularly happy with their handling of the enduring human concerns, especially in their homework, term papers and final exam.”

(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 1 more sections will be involved.

**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

(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. The instructor of record, 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. The Instructional Student Assistant 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 the philosophy at issue. Whenever an Instructional Student Assistant (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. The instructor of record then, if so requested by a student, must reread, provide additional feedback, and regrade the written assignment, if a grade revision is warranted."
In AY 2014-2015, PHIL 10 had two sections that exceeded GE enrollment limits. One of these 32 students over the limit, the other 70 students over the limit. All of the faculty members teaching PHIL 10 require more than 1500 words in written work from their students, write extensive comments on papers, and provide sufficient time before the end of the semester for students to benefit from the comments. Some faculty allow students to rewrite papers for a better grade, or encourage students to turn in a rough draft before the final paper. In addition, faculty with a load of over 130 students total for the semester are provided with ISAs, graduate students or senior philosophy majors, to help with grading. ISAs are trained by the faculty members in best practices of grading written work. Faculty often go over ISA work themselves to keep an eye on quality, and provide additional comments in the process.

In the larger classes it is also the case that all of the faculty involved require the requisite number of words in written work from their students, write extensive comments on papers, and provide sufficient time before the end of the semester for students to benefit from the comments. Department policy is that the second category of larger classes must have one or more ISAs to assist the instructor in grading written work. Grading always means providing written feedback. It should be noted that even our large classes are interactive and allow plenty of room for student involvement and class discussion, both in Socratic dialogue with instructor and based on small group work in class. Frequently the instructors provide feedback in the class by holding up examples of student work as models or by raising writing issues of general concern. There is often class discussion of student answers to exam and other questions. In addition, it is departmental policy that students be made aware of our “Guidelines on Writing Papers in Philosophy,” a shared set of guidelines made available on our department website. Instructors of larger classes as well as the GE coordinators for those courses compare assessment results with those in small sections to see whether there are discrepancies that need to be addressed.

In addition to all of this, we have an office room set aside as a Writing Center, which is staffed by ISAs for three days a week with the sole function of providing students who come in with feedback on writing. This is a supplement to faculty office hours, which themselves are devoted to providing writing feedback among other things.