General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: Philosophy 70B -- History of Renaissance and Modern Philosophy
GE Area: C2     Annual Year 2009-2010
# of sections: 2    # of instructors: 1
Course Coordinator: Tommy Lott  E-mail: Tommy.Lott@sjsu.edu
Department Chair: Rita Manning  College: H & A

Part 1
To be completed by the course coordinator:

(1) What SLO(s) were assessed for the course during the AY?

The assessment concentrates on SLO 1: “Students will be able to recognize how significant works illuminate enduring human concerns.” The course content is primarily classic works by major 17th and 18th-century philosophers. Lectures, discussions, classroom activities, writing assignments, and essay exams are all structured to fulfill this objective. In various ways throughout the course students are required to compare similarities and differences between views held by two or more philosophers with regard to two questions in metaphysics and epistemology respectively: What is there? How do we know?

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

The extent to which students achieved SLO 1 was demonstrated by their progressive improvement on written assignments and exams. On course evaluations students often remark that the readings for the course are very difficult. Many simply have never read original texts in modern philosophy that deal with metaphysics and epistemology. Rather than turn to overly edited anthologies that attempt to doctor archaic language, students are trained in guided steps to do the reading.

Writing assignments are in-class with open book /notes that require students to read and interpret specific passages in response to a prompt that focuses on major ideas. The first writing assignment, before the midterm, requires only a clear statement of the philosopher’s view. The second assignment, after the midterm, goes beyond this and challenges students to apply a philosopher’s view to cases not considered in the text. On exams students are expected to demonstrate what they have learned about each philosopher’s view through prompts that require a comparative analysis of positions taken on a variety of issues.

Most students in the course were able to summarize main points regarding the philosophers’ views, based primarily on lectures and discussions. Roughly half discussed these views critically. Not more than a quarter of the class could accurately discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the positions taken by each philosopher. The lesson gleaned from these results is that students respond best to having everything spelled out so they only need to repeat what they are told, rather than read the material and attempt to understand it. Rather than allow the lectures/discussions to substitute for doing the reading, in future courses, more of the class meetings will be devoted strictly to a group reading of the relevant sections of the text with less of the instructor’s interpretation.
(3) What modifications to the course, or its assessment activities or schedule, are planned for the upcoming year?

No modifications of the basic design and structure of the course are planned, although the specific works/topics studied and teaching strategies continue to vary each semester. The amount of text covered will have to be reduced to accommodate methods of improving student comprehension. None of these content changes will affect the assessment plan, which is based on concrete results demonstrated by students on their papers and essay exams.