General Education Annual Course Assessment Form

Course Number/Title: Philosophy 104 “Asian Philosophy”    GE Area: V

Results reported for AY: 2014-2015 # of sections: 6 # of instructors: 3

Course Coordinator: Bo Mou E-mail: bo.mou@sjsu.edu

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?

We assessed SLO 1: “Students shall be able to compare systematically the ideas, values, images, cultural artifacts, economic structures, technological developments, or attitudes of people from more than one culture outside the U.S.” To achieve this objective, the course takes a comparative approach in philosophy.

The basic strategy to fulfill SOL 1 during the 2014-15 academic year, the beginning year of another round of five-year (2014-2020) assessment plan, is a further implementation of the strategy significantly developed during the previous five-year assessment in this connection. That is, to fulfill SLO 1, this class emphasizes a philosophical comparative examination that distinguishes itself from comparative examination in social sciences and even some other disciplines in humanities in some important aspects. Philosophical comparative examination does not lie in a purely historical description but inquires into how, via reflective criticism and argumentation, distinct views, visions, methodological approaches and resources from different traditions can learn from each other and make joint contributions to our understanding and treatment of a series of issues or topics of philosophical significance, which can jointly be addressed through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point.

With the emphasis on such philosophical comparative examination and with consideration of the typical constitution of the students of this GE class (most of them are neither philosophy majors nor have taken any philosophy classes before), to have the students well-prepared for effectively carrying out the comparative examination in this philosophy class (though the class is cross-referenced as religious studies 104 and Asian studies 104, the class is on Asian philosophy, instead on Asian religion or Asian thought), some modifications concerning the class contents and its assessment activities have been further implemented. As suggested in my assessment reports in the previous five-year assessment, (1) the instructor is expected to briefly introduce the nature, foci, and characteristic features of philosophical inquiries, explain the relation between philosophy and Asian philosophy, and clarify the connection but crucial distinction between philosophical inquiry and religious thinking in examining Asian philosophy; (2) the instructor is expected to explain to the students the distinction and connection between purely historical description and philosophical interpretation regarding how to understand ancient Asian thinkers’ ideas/texts especially when they are compared with some relevant philosophical ideas/resources from other traditions and/or from contemporary philosophy. These contents are intended to help the students philosophically reflect on the relevant differences/similarities between distinct approaches under comparative examination. In the 2014-15 academic year, the class teachings of Phil104 made serious efforts in implementing these suggested enhancements.

To test and assess the students’ capacity and understanding of philosophical comparative examination that involves philosophical interpretation and comparative analysis beyond merely identifying the difference/similarity between the distinct approaches under comparative examination, assessment via essay question is more adequate to serve that purpose than true-false questions and/or multiple-choice question questions, and short-answer questions, though some well-designed true-false or multiple-choice questions could also serve the purpose. In this way, during the latter years of the previous five-year assessment period, it has been suggested that the instructors assess SLO 1 via an essay question involving the aforementioned two
contents that can test the students’ understanding and capacity of philosophical analysis and argumentation in comparative examination at this advance-level GE class (together with or without true-false/multiple-choice questions).

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

In the 2014-15 academic year, Bo Mou taught this class in Spring 2015. He gave the comparative engagement essay questions in both the midterm exam and the final exam: in the midterm exam, the comparative engagement essay question is to give a comparative analysis of Confucius’ and Christian versions of the Golden Rule (in the area of ethics); in the final exam, furthermore, the essay question is a bit more demanding comparative engagement essay question in the area of metaphysics understood broadly involving a comparative engagement examination of Daoist, Hinduist, Buddhist and Platonic approaches to the issue of being versus becoming. Both essay questions are not limited to give what are similar and different but further engage the student to think about how these relevant resources can jointly contribute to their understanding and treatment of the issues under examination. The testing result of the midterm essay question is quite representative, which is given as follows: The number of the students who took the test: 61 (62 minus one who is “late withdraw”); A (very good) level: 17; B (good/satisfactory) level: 27; the total number of the students with very good, good and Satisfactory answers is 44 (72%); C and D level (just o.k. but not very satisfactory): 15; F (failure) level is 2.

Chanh Phan taught this class in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015. His assessment result is this: (1) for Fall 2014, total Students: 75 (2 sections); total students passed: 59 students or 79% [a) 100% Range: 1 student; b) 90% Range: 15 students; c) 80% Range: 20 students; d) 70% Range: 11 students; e) 60% Range: 12 students]; total students failed: 16 students or 21%. (2) for Spring 2015, total Students: 35 (1 section); total students passed: 31 students or 89% [a) 100% Range: 5 student; b) 90% Range: 7 students; c) 80% Range: 7 students; d) 70% Range: 4 students; e) 60% Range: 8 students]; total students failed: 4 students or 11%.

Anand Vaidya taught two sections of this class in the 2014-15 year. His assessment result is this. He has designed one comparative-engagement essay question for the midterm Exam, i.e., critically discuss the foundations of yoga in classical Indian philosophy, and how it originated in Sankhya philosophy and critically discuss the differences between yoga has a traditional Indian practice, and how it is practiced in the west. After looking over the exam results, he concluded that the students had a fair grasp of the difference between the what yoga initially was in the context of classical Indian philosophy, and what it is now in the west. In addition, the results showed that students appreciated learning the difference because it allowed them to understand how cultural appropriation happens and functions in society. Overall, the teaching module was quite successful. In the future Vaidya plans to include a question on how the commodification of yoga in the west undermines some of the intent of yoga as a practice aimed at well-being.

The lessons learned from the (past and this) assessment are essentially already addressed in the answer to the first question above.

(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.)

In view of the aforementioned considerations, next semester all the instructors are required to follow the unifying procedure of assessment as specified above. We will assess this in 2017-18 academic year when SOL 1 is focused on again, To assist all the instructors of Phil104 to effectively fulfill SOL 1 in the philosophical-comparative-examination setting of Phil104, Bo Mou as the Phil104 GE coordinator plans to hold a further meeting with the other instructors.

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
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."
Explanation of Practices Used in Teaching Sections of PHIL 104 Exceeding GE Enrollment Limits, Response to Memo sent by UGS office

Date: November 10, 2015  
From: Bo Mou, PHIL 104 GE Coodinator

PHIL104 for Fall 2015 semester has 4 sections with the total more than 100 students, including two large online sections each of which has more than 40 students. All of the faculty members involved require the requisite number of words [3000 words for this GE class in Area V] 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 the first version of the term paper (such a draft needs to meet all the expectations and not be just a “rough draft”) before the final paper.

Even large classes of PHIL104 are interactive and allow plenty of room for student involvement and in-class or online discussion, both in Socratic dialogue with instructor and via the students’ own engaging discussion between themselves with the instructor’s due guidance. 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 as well as the GE coordinators for those courses compare assessment results to see whether there are discrepancies that need to be addressed.

In addition, we have a former 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.