Explanation of Practices Used in Teaching Sections of PHIL 110 Exceeding GE Enrollment Limits, Response to Memo Sent by UGS office

Date: November 13, 2015
From: Janet D. Stemwedel, Chair, Department of Philosophy

In AY 2014-2015, PHIL 110 had two sections that exceeded GE enrollment limits, one of which was 9 students over the limit, the other of which was 10 students over the limit. All of the faculty members teaching PHIL 110 require more than 3000 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.

Sections of PHIL 110 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 all sections of PHIL 110 as well as the GE coordinator for PHIL 110 compare assessment results between 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.