2012-2013 Assessment Report
Program: Philosophy, BA

College of Liberal Arts
Philosophy
Philosophy, BA

Expected Outcome 1: Analytical Reading

Students will be able to extract arguments from primary texts, offer interpretations of texts that are both sympathetic and successful in making the issues and concerns of the text 'alive' from the standpoint of the contemporary reader, and contextualize the project of one text in relation to others with which it is in conversation.

Assessment Method 1: Written Work

Assessment Method Description

Every final term paper in 4000-level classes is assessed during the grading process using the "Material Understanding" section of the "Department Rubric" (attached). All 39 final essays were assessed from the three 4000-level courses offered during the 2012-13 academic year. Every student must take at least two 4000-level class for the Philosophy major. The 4000-level courses serve much the same role that capstone courses serve in other programs.
Findings

Most students (>50%) are able to present clear, complete, and correct accounts of what they have read (Excellent) and almost all students are able to offer accounts without serious errors (Good). Most students (>80%) can present the main issue being discussed in what they read as well as the relevant sides of that issue (Good), and many (>30%) demonstrate control over the philosophical dynamic (Excellent).

How did you use findings for improvement?
See "Annual Discussion" below.

Additional Comments

Assessment Method 2: Annual Discussion

Assessment Method Description
We devote at least one department meeting a year to discussing the
students in our major and assessing their skills. This meeting relies partly on the impressions of faculty members, but also on information gathered from other assessment methods.

Findings
We note improvement in these skills, which we attribute to our increased emphasis on these skills over the past two years. Faculty report that, increasingly, they are testing for reading skills prior to lecturing about the material and that this emphasis has both improved analytical reading skills and classroom participation.

How did you use findings for improvement?
We continue to assign tasks that both insure that students are reading (rather than relying on lectures) and offer us better ways to assess for analytical reading skills. We are also requiring these tasks now in all of our classes (not just 4000-level classes) and looking for these requirements in our annual peer reviews.

Additional Comments

Assessment Method 3: Student Assessment

Assessment Method Description
Students are interviewed by the Department Chair and Faculty advisors about their impressions of how well the program has developed reading, writing, and argumentative skills in relation to their peers in other programs.

Findings
All of the students interviewed (8) believe that their analytical reading skills are at least good and better than their peers in other programs.

How did you use the findings for improvement?
This method has never given us much information, and that information has often been inconsistent. We created a new survey that is currently being administered and we hope that this give us more useful information. Those results will be available for future assessment reports. (Also see "Annual Discussion" above.)

Additional Comments
Expected Outcome 2: Argumentative Skills
Students will be able to: 1. distinguish valid and invalid arguments, consider and assess forms of inference, 2. track and understand lines of reasoning through various phases of a dialectic (e.g. distinguish claims, arguments, objections, replies, premises from conclusion, explanations from arguments, and so forth).

Assessment Method 1: Written Work
Assessment Method Description
Every final term paper in 4000-level classes is assessed during the grading process using a standard rubric. (The rubric is attached, and the relevant part of the rubric is under "Argument".) Two 4000-level courses are required of every student, and serve the functional role played by capstone courses in other programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Understanding</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Level Exegesis</td>
<td>Clear, complete, and correct account of relevant aspects of examined positions, writings.</td>
<td>No serious errors, but presentation makes position hard to understand.</td>
<td>Interpretive misunderstandings on display, but main points are correct.</td>
<td>Betrays fundamental misunderstandings of examined positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Level Issues</td>
<td>Demonstrates control over the philosophical dynamic. Puzzle, sympathetic understandings of sides, and their underlying motivations are clear.</td>
<td>Main issues and sides are stated out clearly, but not contextualized or are presented one-sidedly.</td>
<td>Main topic is understood, but little or no control over the relations of the parts to one another.</td>
<td>Main question or topic of paper is misunderstood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Argument               | Thesis is clearly stated. | Thesis present, but not clearly stated. | Unstated thesis only partly in focus of author. | Thesis is absent, inappropriate or incomprehensible. |
|                       | Reasoning                | Explicit argument is invalid, has gaps in reasoning. | Only sketch of argumentative support present. | No acceptable attempt is made to support the thesis. |
|                       | Premises                 | Explicit premises on offer, but little or no further discussion or support. | Premises not explicitly identified. | |
| Objections             | Good objections are stated and reasonable responses supplied. | Obvious objections are shouldered, but responses are limited. | Only superficial consideration of objections; no responses on offer. | No opposing positions considered. |

|                       | Structure                | Considered organization is appropriate to and aids | While paper is adequately organized, improvements | Paper is not well organized. Structural |

| Spelling and Grammar   | Few or no deviations from SWG grammar and spelling. | Occasional deviations from SWG grammar and spelling. | Frequent deviations from SWG grammar and spelling. | Continual deviations from SWG grammar and spelling. |
| Insight and Creativity | Interesting, original, independent thought. | Evidence of some independent thought about and engagement with the issues. | Workmanlike. | Wholly derivative of readings and class lecture. |
Findings
39 students were enrolled in 4000-level courses for the 2012-13 academic year. The majority of our students (>75%) were able to state a thesis clearly (excellent) and employ clear and valid reasoning (excellent). Nearly all of our students (>90%) could offer explicit premises (good/excellent) and at least the most obvious objections (good/excellent).

How did you use findings for improvement?
Teaching these skills is a departmental strength, but given the importance of these skills in our discipline, we conclude that our students fall short of where they need to be. We will include more short writing assignments requiring that students make explicit both arguments in texts they are reading, and in arguments of their own creation.

Additional Comments

Assessment Method 2: Annual Discussion
Assessment Method Description
We devote a department meeting every year to discussing the students in our majors and assessing their skills. This discussion relies partly on the impressions of faculty members, but also on information gathered from other assessment methods. A part of the meeting is used to discuss, particular, how students are doing in the relation to the skills on the "Department Rubric."

Findings
Faculty judge that this set of skills is a strength of our students, and so of our program. Faculty do not feel, however, that students generally do well enough with respect to any of these skills, if they plan to continue their philosophical studies into graduate school.

How did you use findings for improvement?
See above.

Additional Comments

Assessment Method 3: Student Assessment
Assessment Method Description
Students are interviewed by the Department Chair and Faculty advisors about their impressions of how well the program has
developed reading, writing, and argumentative skills in relation to their peers in other programs. The interviews include discussions of the skills listed on the "Department Rubric", but we also invite open-ended comments from students about their educational experiences.

**Findings**
The students interviewed (8) conclude that they have strong argumentative skills, although they are better at constructing arguments than they are at reconstructing arguments found in texts. (It should be noted that the texts they have in mind are generally very complex.)

**How did you use the findings for improvement?**
See above.

**Additional Comments**

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**Expected Outcome 3: Philosophical Knowledge**
Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of the history of philosophy, contemporary metaphysics and epistemology, and axiology.

**Assessment Method 1: Annual Discussion**

**Assessment Method Description**
We devote at least one department meeting a year to discussing the students in our major and assessing their skills. This meeting relies partly on the impressions of faculty members, but also on information gathered from other assessment methods. Students are required to take a history of philosophy sequence and to satisfy distribution requirements, and this insures that all students receive training in all of the major areas of philosophy. Faculty based their judgments on their observations of all of the written and oral work of the 58 students enrolled in History of Philosophy courses, the 68 students enrolled in Metaphysics and Epistemology courses, and the 54 enrolled in Axiology courses for the current assessment period.

**Findings**
Faculty conclude that nearly all of our students have at least a very basic knowledge of the major areas of philosophy. They also conclude that none of our current students have acquired mastery of any of these areas.
How did you use findings for improvement?
The Department's current view is that basic knowledge of philosophy is more important for an undergraduate program than mastery of any particular area, but we worry that breadth has been given too much weight. We decided to alter our history requirement allowing students to take more concentrated courses (e.g., a course on Aristotle) in place of more general history courses (e.g., History of Ancient Philosophy).

Additional Comments

Expected Outcome 4: Writing
Students will be able to: 1. clearly explain a philosophical problem, purported solutions to such and arguments in favor and against these; 2. offer critical discussion of these that goes beyond merely reporting; 3. argue for the claims one makes, where such arguments are valid and have premises that for which some reasonable attempt has been made to secure their plausibility; 4. articulate fully abstract claims in explicit, minimally-figurative language; 5. produce written work that sustains a coherent intellectual narrative and succeeds in including what is relevant and excluding what is not; 6. demonstrate a mastery of Standard Written English in matters of grammar, diction, and style.

Assessment Method 1: Written Work
Assessment Method Description
Every final term paper in 4000-level classes is assessed during the grading process using a standard rubric. There were 39 final papers to assess for the 2012-13 academic year. (The Writing skill, for us, is a skill that involves the others we teach. A well written paper, for instance, must demonstrate understanding of the philosophical material, mastery of argumentative skills, and so forth. We have discussed these skills with respect to writing elsewhere in our report. Here we focus on those skills addressed in the "Writing" section of the "Department Rubric" (expected outcomes 5 and 6, from above).)

Findings
Almost all of our students (>90%) write papers that are clear, concise, concrete, and readable (Good to Excellent). More than half of our students do so consistently (Excellent). Most of our students (>80%) write papers that are at least adequately organized (Good to
Excellent) and more than half write papers that are well organized (Excellent). Almost all of our students (>97%) write with no more than occasional deviations from standard written English grammar and spelling (Good to Excellent) and more than half write with few or no such deviations.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**
See "Annual Discussion" below.

**Additional Comments**

**Assessment Method 2: Annual Discussion**

**Assessment Method Description**
We devote at least one department meeting a year to discussing the students in our major and assessing their skills. This meeting relies partly on the impressions of faculty members, but also on information gathered from other assessment methods.

**Findings**
The increased emphasis on multiple drafts, and the use of the Department's rubric for feedback, seems to have aided student learning without imposing additional work on faculty. Students not only master the requisite skills to a reasonable degree, but seem to be improving at a greater pace, and they are also learning how to assess their own work and the work of their peers.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**
Faculty now require multiple drafts for all 4000-level papers and for most 3000-level papers as well.

**Additional Comments**