General Information

1. Name / Number of Course / Sequence:
   PHIL 1010/7, 1020/7, 1020/7, 1040 (1050, 1060, 1070, 1080, 1090, and 1100 were not offered)

2. SLO(s) being assessed:
   Student will be able to read analytically and critically and be able to critique and construct an argument effectively.

3. Department:
   Philosophy

4. Department Representative:
   Michael Watkins

5. AGSC Content Alignment:
   AREA II: Humanities

Assessment Information

6. Assessment Method: [Explain how assessment for the measures associated with this SLO – not grading for the course as a whole was conducted.]

   1. Exam, quiz, and essay questions were used in most classes to test a student's ability to read analytically and critically and to critique arguments effectively (SLO2 and SLO3). (Sample questions are available on request.) Students were evaluated specifically for the following skills: the ability to identify the author's thesis (SLO 2, Measure 2), the ability to analyze the major points made in supporting the thesis (SLO 2, Measure 3), the ability to evaluate how well the author supports the thesis (SLO 2, Measure 7), the
ability to identify and state the central argument of a paper or papers (SLO 3, Measure 1, which is taken to include the ability to identify and evaluate the key assumptions and supporting evidence presented in that argument (SLO 3, Measures 2 and 3)). Most sections of 1010/17 did not teach to or assess for all of these measures. They will, starting Fall 2011.

2. A short paper/essay assignment was required for most courses. Assignments were designed partly to test a student's ability to construct an effective argument (SLO 3). More specifically, arguments were assessed for how well they were structured (Measure 14), and so for whether the essay established a suitable central thesis (Measure 10) and supported that thesis with reasonable assumptions (Measure 11). Papers were also assessed for how well students anticipate and respond to possible objections (Measure 13). Most sections of 1010/17 and some sections of 1040 did not require this assignment last year. They were required to use some version of this assignment beginning Fall 2011.

3. The faculty devoted a meeting in the fall to discuss the extent to which the learning outcomes were met, relying on personal experience as well as the assessment results above. We discussed ways in which courses might be improved in light of these results. We also discussed ways in which the assessment tools might be improved either to gain more information or to simply the process.

7. Findings: [What assessment data did each assessment method produce?]

1. Results were not uniform across the courses, but primarily because some of the classes did not teach to or assess for all of the relevant measures. Students in most of the Phil 1010 sections were never asked to construct arguments in a natural language, for instance.

2. Student answers seemed to indicate that most students had acquired the ability to read analytically and critically. But the faculty was skeptical of this result, suspecting that most students were not reading and relying instead on lectures.

3. On average, students were reasonably good at determining "the gist" of arguments. They were, on average, far worse at reconstructing arguments in the kind of detail required to assess the argument's structure or to differentiate between claims that are superficially similar but importantly different.
8. How did you or will you use the findings for improvement: [What questions / issues/ concerns did your data raise for the faculty teaching the course? What discussion did the faculty have about the findings? What future actions to improve student attainment of this outcome will the department / program take as a result of this analysis?]

1. Faculty have agreed on a rubric to use for assessing SLO 3 (see attached). Most of the faculty started using the rubric during the Fall of 2011. Everyone teaching a core course will use the rubric by the Spring of 2012.

2. Faculty discussed various ideas for encouraging students to read and to read critically prior to class. In the major courses, we have found some success using short (one minute) writing assignments, short quizzes, etc. Increasingly these methods are being used in core courses and faculty agree that more, and perhaps just more of the same, needs to be done.

3. Faculty agree that students need to be writing more argumentative papers and need to be writing more drafts of what they write. We do not know how to reasonably accomplish the former without more resources, but, using our rubric, we have had some promising results having students assess their own drafts and drafts of their fellow students in major courses. Many of the faculty will be employing those strategies in core courses during the 2011-12 academic year.

4. All faculty in all core courses are required, starting Fall 2011, to teach to the same Learning Outcomes and the same measures within those outcomes. This will result in significant changes in how some of these courses are taught, especially 1010/7. Faculty have agreed to make these changes.

9. Additional comments: [What else would you like the Committee to know about your assessment of this course or plans for the future?] None

10. Core Curriculum General Education Committee Comments:

This is a very strong report-- both in terms of the assessment process it describes and in terms of the clarity of its presentation. Nonetheless, there were some questions about the actual data collected: while the rubric faculty agreed to use was presented, there
were no details about the levels of student performance on individual items on the rubric.