Core Curriculum Assessment Report
2013_14

Department: Philosophy
Representative: michael watkins

Course Name / number: PHIL1010/1017, PHIL1020/1024, PHIL1030/1037, PHIL1040, PHIL1050, PHIL1060, PHIL1070, PHIL1080, PHIL1090, PHIL1100

1. **AGSC Content Area of Alignment:** Area II: Humanities

2. **SLO(s) being assessed:** Student will...
   
   SLO 2: Students will be able to read analytically and critically.
   
   SLO 3: Students will be able to critique and construct an argument effectively.

3. **Assessment Method(s):**
   
   [Explain how assessment for the measures associated with this SLO - not grading for the course as a whole - was conducted. You may cut/paste rubrics for inclusion here, identify faculty reviewing committees, or identify specific kinds of test questions important to your method. Is this the method you initially planned to use? Provide a separate paragraph for each method].

   Every instructor is required to identify assignments, or parts of assignments, that will be used to assess for both SLO 2 and 3, and for every measure within those SLOs for which we have agreed to assess (see [A] below, for an example). The appropriateness of those assignments is determined both during annual peer reviews and during an annual Department meeting dedicated to assessing the core. Faculty may employ their own rubrics in assessing their classes, but they are required to use the department’s approved rubric when submitting information to the department (see [B] below). This information is collected and discussed at our annual meeting. At our annual core assessment meeting, faculty are asked to provide their general impressions of how well students are acquiring the skills listed under SLO 2 and 3, to identify what we take to be the strengths and weaknesses of our students both before and after completing core philosophy classes, and to suggest ways in which we might better teach to the relevant measures. [A] Each student will collaborate with another student to produce a written exchange about Martha Nussbaum’s “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach.” Each student will be responsible for 4 paragraphs of writing, each no more than 250 words. Student X will present and defend Nussbaum’s view. Student Y will present and defend one objection to Nussbaum’s view. The exchange will take the following form: Paragraph 1: Student X presents Nussbaum’s view. This paragraph should state the main aim of the paper and explain what Nussbaum means by “grounding experiences,” “thin specification of a virtue,” and “thick specification of a virtue.” Paragraph 2: Student Y presents one objection to Nussbaum’s view. I suggest that student Y choose one of the three objections that Nussbaum herself considers, but student Y is free to develop her own objection if she chooses. Paragraph 3: Student X responds to the objection made in paragraph 2. I suggest that student X develop one of Nussbaum’s own responses to the objection (if possible) but student X is free to develop her own response if she chooses. Paragraph 4: Student Y responds to the response made in paragraph 3. Paragraph 5: Student X responds to the response made in paragraph 4. Paragraph 6: Student Y responds to the response made in paragraph 5. Paragraph 7: Student X sums up the exchange. She explains what she and Y can agree on, what she and Y cannot agree on, what she must concede to Y, what truth there might be in Y’s position, or why someone might (perhaps wrongly) be inclined to go along with Y’s arguments. She also explains what portions of her original position still stand in light of Y’s successful criticism. Paragraph 8: Student X sums up the exchange. She explains what she and Y can agree on, what she and Y cannot agree on, what she must concede to Y, what truth there might be in Y’s position, or why someone might (perhaps wrongly) be inclined to go along with Y’s arguments. She also explains what portions of her original position still stand in light of Y’s successful criticism and elaboration. The writing assignment will be assessed along the following dimensions: • Spelling and grammar • Readability and polish of prose • Clarity of presentation • Accuracy of textual interpretation • Strength of argumentation • Creativity of thought • Responsiveness to one’s partner’s points • Focus of argumentation (not changing the subject but pursuing one line of thought in depth) [B] Excellent Good Needs Improvement Inadequate Material Understanding Low Level
Exegesis
Clear, complete, and correct account of relevant aspects of examined positions, writings. No serious errors, but presentation makes position hard to understand. Interpretive misunderstandings on display, but main points are correct. Betrays fundamental misunderstandings of examined positions. High Level Issues
Demonstrates control over the philosophical dynamic. Puzzle, sympathetic understandings of sides, and their underlying motivations are clear. Main issue and sides are staked out clearly, but not contextualized or are presented one-sidedly. Main topic is understood, but little or no control over the relations of the parts to one another. Main question or topic of paper is misunderstood. Argument
Thesis
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
Clear, valid reasoning on offer. Explicit argument is invalid, has gaps in reasoning. Only sketch of argumentative support present. No acceptable attempt is made to support the thesis. Premises
Explicitly, individually stated. Further defense offered where appropriate. 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 shoulder, but responses are limited. Only superficial consideration of objections; no responses on offer. No opposing positions considered. Writing Style
Consistently clear, concise, concrete, readable idiom. Inconsistently clear, concise, concrete and readable. Rarely clear, concise, concrete and readable. Style hinders comprehension. Style frequently makes the author incomprehensible. Structure
Considered organization is appropriate to and aids reader’s comprehension. While paper is adequately organized, improvements would aid comprehension. Paper is not well-organized. Structural problems hinder comprehension. Paper appears totally unplanned, disorganized. Spelling and Grammar
Few or no deviations from SWE grammar and spelling. Occasional deviations from SWE grammar and spelling. Frequent deviations form SWE grammar and spelling. Continual deviations from SWE 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.

4. Findings: What assessment data did each assessment method produce?

Students are generally weak at identifying arguments within a text, and so they are generally weak at “identifying the writer’s purpose” and at identifying the premises used to support that purpose, which we take to be a first step towards analyzing those points. The students are fair to good at analyzing those arguments once they are identified. Likewise, students are generally weak at “identifying and stating central arguments”, which includes identifying the key assumptions and supporting evidence. They are much better at evaluating those key assumptions once they are known. Students are fair to good at constructing effective arguments, including establishing a suitable thesis, constructing an argument based on reasonable assumptions, an structuring an argument effectively. They are fair at anticipating and dealing effectively with possible objections.

5. 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?]

We had earlier identified as a weakness our student’s abilities to read critically and analytically. Part of the problem, we concluded, is that they are generally not required to do this work. Assignments concerning the reading are generally due after lecture and class discussion. Consequently, we have found, most of our students rely on those lectures. We now require that some assignments test students’ abilities to read critically and analytically prior to discussion of those readings. That not only provides a way to assess reading, but also
requires students to practice those skills. Faculty are currently experimenting with various methods for getting students to read and to read more carefully, including short writing assignments and quizzes at the beginning of class, take-home assignments consisting of questions about the reading that are to be completed before class, and oral presentations.

6. Additional Comments:
[What else would you like the Committee to know about your assessment of this course or plans for the future?]

In addition to the approved measures under SLO 3, the department teaches to and assesses for an additional measure: “students will be able to evaluate the relationship between the assumptions/evidence provided and the conclusion for which those assumption/evidence were provided”. We take this to be a central component, perhaps the central component, in understanding, evaluating, and creating arguments, and none of the approved measures seem to address this critical skill. This is a skill that is not native; students generally come to class with a very poor understanding of these relationships. Our classes spend a considerable amount of time on developing these skills and with considerable success. Although students do not have these skills at the level that we feel university students should, their improvement is considerable. This is a skill that requires and deserves more support from other classes. The other skill, or set of skills, that requires support from other classes is the ability to read analytically and critically. Students are clearly not accustomed to being expected to read and understand college level material. They are accustomed to having that material explained to them. Our better students are good at understanding what we explain. They listen, take notes, and come to our offices with questions. But only our best students are doing the reading with anything like the care that should be demanded of them. At least that is the very strong impression that we have from our assessment.

7. Committee Comments
Mean of rubric score = 3.45 (out of 4) I could not find the data, just the conclusions. Based upon the conclusions this class appears to be addressing SLO 2 well, but the report suggests SLO 3 is not being met well, if at all. Some of the cause of this deficiency is identified in the report as a lack of preparation before the students have even arrived to the class.