

Philosophy Department 2015 Annual Assessment Report

Department: Philosophy

Date: September 15, 2015

Department Chair: Jim Taylor

I. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

Program Learning Outcome	Philosophical Reflections: "Students will be able to articulate major philosophical ideas and describe their bearing on the Christian liberal arts."
Who is in Charge	Jim Taylor
Direct Assessment Methods	At the end of the semester, Jim assigned a 1000-word essay to the 43 students in his spring 2015 Philosophical Perspectives class that required them to reflect on the philosophical implications of the Christian liberal arts theme of responsible citizenship in God's Kingdom and the Christian's accountability, at the Last Judgment, for how he or she has lived his or her life. The students were allowed to choose among the following philosophical topics for this purpose: the mind/body problem, the problem of personal identity across time, the problem of freedom and determinism, and the question of whether we have a moral duty to benefit needy people. Appendix A contains the prompt for this essay assignment.
Indirect Assessment Methods	None
Major Findings	Relative to the PLO stated above, 13 of the 43 students (30%) were highly developed, 10 (23%) were developed, 16 (37%) were emerging, and 4 (10%) were initial. That means that 53% of the students were either developed or highly developed. Since our benchmark is for 75% of the students to be at least developed, we will need to work on closing the gap.
Closing the Loop Activities	At our department meeting on Tuesday, September 15 th , 2015, we had a preliminary conversation about what we can do to close the gap between the 53% students who were at least developed on this assignment and the 75% that we have set for our benchmark in this area.
<p>Discussion We discussed these results at our department meeting on Tuesday, September 15th, and we agreed that we need to develop a rubric for this essay assignment.</p>	

II. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome	Reasoning Abstractly: "Students will be able to recognize, construct, and evaluate instances of abstract reasoning."
Who is in Charge	Jim Taylor
Major Findings	In our 2014 annual report, we mentioned that Jim had administered a number of tests in the spring 2014 section of PHI-012 (Critical Reasoning & Logic) and that our GE Reasoning Abstractly assessment would be based on how the 30 students in this class performed on selected questions on these tests. We said at that time that only some of the questions on these tests are relevant for the assessment of student learning relative to the Reasoning Abstractly SLO (stated above). We have now placed the relevant questions into the appropriate SLO categories (recognition, construction, and evaluation), and we have determined how the students performed overall on each of these questions. Our assessment of student learning in the argument recognition category was based on 13 questions that required students to recognize informal fallacies and 7 questions requiring students to recognize valid deductive argument forms. The average score in this section was 83.6%. Our assessment of student learning in the argument evaluation category was based on 10 questions that required students to determine whether a given argument is deductively valid or invalid or inductively strong or weak and 5 questions that required students to determine whether an argument symbolized in predicate logic is deductively valid or invalid. The average score in this section was 71.3%. Our assessment of student learning in the argument construction category was based on 5 questions requiring students to construct proofs in statement logic, 1 question involving the use of an inference rule, 3 questions requiring students to construct a proofs in statement logic using conditional proof and reduction ad absurdum, and 2 questions requiring students to construct proofs in predicate logic. The average score in this section was 68%. In summary, the results were 83.6% in argument recognition, 71.3% in argument evaluation, and 68% in argument construction. Since our benchmark in this area is that our students average 80% in each category, our major finding is that our students are doing adequately in the argument recognition category but need to improve in argument evaluation and argument construction. See Appendix B for the raw data and exam questions.
Closing the Loop Activities	We have recently received approval for a new Formal Logic course (PHI 108) for which students can receive GE Reasoning Abstractly credit. David is in the process of developing that course, and he will work to implement instruction in it that will address student learning needs in the areas of argument evaluation and construction. David is also revamping PHI 12

	(Critical Reasoning & Logic), and he will attend to these areas of student learning need in that course as well. We will be submitting the revised PHI 12 to the GE Committee later this fall for approval as a GE Reasoning Abstractly course.
<p>Discussion</p> <p>We discussed these results at our 9/15/2015 meeting. We agreed that it's not surprising that our students did best in argument recognition, next best in argument evaluation, and least well in argument construction. Our efforts will be focused primarily on the latter two skills in the future and especially the third.</p>	

Program Learning Outcome	Philosophy Major Skills PLO: "Students will be able to construct structurally solid arguments and to critique faulty ones appropriately."
Who is in Charge	David Vander Laan
Major Findings	The department has continued to discuss the results of its 2014 Skills PLO assessment. The department reviewed the ways in which it has closed the loop and discussed other ways to make use of last year's findings.
Closing the Loop Activities	David designed a Skills rubric and included it in his Senior Seminar syllabus. He distributed the rubric to other members of the department for inclusion in future upper division course syllabi. See Appendix C for this rubric.
<p>Discussion</p> <p>At its June 2015 meeting the department decided to have further conversation about building "scaffolding" assignments into the curriculum to help ensure that students have had sufficient practice developing logical skills before they take the Senior Seminar. Some of these may be included in the courses that are currently being redesigned (see section III below). One of these is Critical Reasoning and Logic, which would be a natural home for such assignments. The department will seek approval for Reasoning Abstractly credit for the redesigned course this fall. We also discussed this aspect of our program assessment again at our 9/15/2015 meeting.</p>	

III. Other assessment or Key Questions-related projects

Project	Curricular Changes
Who is in Charge	Nelson, Taylor, Vander Laan
Major Findings	As discussed in previous reports, the department has noted that in a number of cases a course would provide students with significantly greater depth if its contents were distributed across two courses.
Action	Vander Laan designed syllabi for three new courses: Formal Logic, Ancient Philosophy, and Medieval Philosophy. Taylor designed syllabi for two new courses: Modern Philosophy, and 19th and 20th Century Philosophy. The department submitted courses proposals and received approval for each of the five. Ancient Philosophy is currently underway, and the other four will be taught over the next two years.
<p>Discussion Last spring was a busy planning season for the department. In addition to the above, Taylor proposed and received approval for another new course (Intellectual Virtue and Civil Discourse, currently underway) and Ed Song proposed and received approval for a course to be taught at the Westmont Center for Social Entrepreneurship entitled, "Justice and Public Policy." Also, since much of the content of the old Critical Reasoning and Logic will now belong to Formal Logic, Vander Laan is revamping the former. All told, the department will effectively be offering eight new courses and retiring three old ones. This is a noteworthy step in the direction of diversifying the department's course offerings, which has been a goal of the department since at least its last 6-year report.</p>	

Project	Refine "Virtues" Assessment for Philosophy Major
Who is in Charge	Mark Nelson
Major Findings	We have changed the wording of our description of the "Virtue" PLO since the last time we assessed it. And so we need to change the rubric accordingly. Also, the rubric needs to be more consistent and uniform with our other rubrics.
Action	Develop a new rubric that better fits the new wording and is more uniform and consistent with our other rubrics.
<p>Discussion During a recent departmental meeting, we jointly decided what we needed to do. Because Mark will be the next one to assess the</p>	

Virtues PLO, he took the lead on drafting a new rubric for at least one writing assignment in PHI-104. This was circulated with Jim & David before the 09/15/2015 department meeting, so that we were able to discuss and edit it together at that meeting. Among the issues we discussed at that meeting was whether the “intellectual humility” component of the rubric (concerning student realization of the limits of reason) should include the recognition that some important knowledge can be acquired apart from the use of reason (such as the knowledge that God exists). We will continue to discuss refinements to this rubric (and this aspect of it in particular) in upcoming department meetings this fall.

IV. Appendices

- A. Philosophical Perspectives Essay Prompt
- B. Reasoning Abstractly Assessment Data & Exam Questions
- C. Philosophy Skills PLO Rubric
- D. Philosophy Virtues PLO Rubric
- E. Philosophy Virtues PLO Assessment Notes