Assessment of Student Learning in University General Education Core Curriculum Courses:
PHIL2003 (Introduction to Philosophy), PHIL2103 (Introduction to Ethics), PHIL2203
(Introduction to Logic), and PHIL3103 (Ethics and the Professions)
Department of Philosophy
University of Arkansas
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For results, please see pp. 5-7.

WHAT UNIVERSITY GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES GUIDE STUDENT LEARNING IN COURSES THAT CARRY HUMANITIES CREDIT?

Upon completion of three hours of humanities courses, students will understand and articulate

- (HU LO1) Basic structures, themes, and principles of the discipline being introduced.
- (HU LO 2) Philosophical, religious, and/or ethical ideas relevant to the discipline as introduced by writers, artists, and/or thinkers.
- (HU LO 3) Processes by which creative and/or humanistic values are formed and criticized over time.
- (HU LO 4) Connections among cultural achievements of various groups of people, such as those of different ethnicities, religious and racial backgrounds, geographical origins and/or sexual identities.

HOW DOES THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY INTEND TO ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING OF THESE OUTCOMES IN CORE COURSES?

Please see "Assessment of Student Learning in University General Education Core Curriculum Courses", below. Assessment will be conducted by means of pre- and post-testing, and, where possible, by instructor reports on written work. Results will be compiled and interpreted by the departmental assessment committee.

HOW IS THE ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT KEYED TO THE UNIVERSITY GENERAL EDUCATION CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THE HUMANITIES?

- HU LO1: Students are assessed on their knowledge of diverse and important figures in philosophy and on their knowledge of basic themes ("big problems") in philosophy.
- HU LO2: Students are assessed on their skill in reading a variety of historical and contemporary texts by important figures in philosophy.
- HU LO3: Students not only gain practice in, but also reflect upon, critical processes and practices by which ideas and values are formed and revised.
- HU LO4: Students gain understanding of basic ethical ideas such as justice and tolerance, as well as learn critical skills for assessing disagreements and broadening horizons.

HOW WILL THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY USE THE DATA GENERATED BY THIS INSTRUMENT TO PLAN CURRICULAR AND PEDAGOGICAL CHANGES THAT MIGHT BE NECESSARY IN CORE COURSES?

The Department of Philosophy assesses student learning in core courses (PHIL2003, 2103, 2203, 3103) by administering a pre-test of student knowledge of basic philosophical issues, concepts, and positions at the beginning of class and a post-test over that same content at the end of class. Scores are compared as a measure of student progress and teaching effectiveness.

Results are compiled and interpreted by the departmental assessment committee. Suggestions for improvement will be conveyed to and discussed with instructors of core courses before the beginning of each term.

In addition, the Department's Assessment Committee reviews written work from core courses and reports on room for improvement and successes along the dimensions of critical thinking and communications skills and knowledge of content. Suggestions for improvement are shared among all instructors of core courses; progress will be noted across time. This procedure is outlined in our Academic Program Assessment Plan and copied below (pp. 3-4). Results and proposed improvements are listed on pp. 5-7.

From Academic Program Assessment Plan – General Guidelines for Assessing Core Courses

1. Program Goals

Students in Philosophy core courses will:

- Improve critical reading, writing, thinking, and argumentative skills of the kind useful in philosophy and all subjects;
- Develop a basic understanding of the discipline of philosophy through studying a diversity of major issues and of major historical figures.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students in Philosophy core courses will:

- Gain practice in evaluating arguments;
- Gain skill in reading difficult and diverse philosophical texts;
- Develop skills in writing with clarity, depth and coherence;
- Gain understanding of specific issues and figures in philosophy;
- Gain practice in evaluating their own ideas and presuppositions as well as other, possibly divergent, values and points of view.

2. Means of Assessment and Desired Level of Student Achievement

Students are regularly assessed on the basis of written work in the form of papers and essay exams.

For purposes of assessment of program goals and outcomes, papers will be collected from a selection of core courses. In addition, for the large lecture course PHIL2003C, students will take a pre- and post-test on the basis of which their performance will be evaluated. Instructors in the selected courses will grade papers according to usual procedures and will evaluate them on the two dimensions of:

1) Critical thinking, communication and writing skills, including but not limited to:

- The student writes with clarity and accuracy;
- The student displays care in understanding a diversity of positions and values with accuracy and fairness and in presenting his or her own ideas clearly and in ways that are relevant to his or her main points;
- The student shows the ability to analyze and evaluate arguments;
- The student proceeds critically in examining his or her own presuppositions and assumptions.

2) Knowledge and understanding of content, including but not limited to:

- The student's written work displays understanding of central concepts and terminology;
- The student's written work shows a grasp of basic ideas in the areas of philosophy under consideration and their application;
- The student begins to explore historically important positions and figures where relevant, and is able to compare a diversity of points of view;
- The student's thinking on the issues shows gains in coherence, breadth and depth.

Each instructor will assign a numerical score of 0-3 to each of these two dimensions, using the following scale:

0) Does not meet expectations;
1) Minimally meets expectations;

2) Meets expectations well, with room for improvement;

3) Exceeds expectations.

He or she will summarize these numerical scores and write a brief report on where in general students' written work shows need for improvement and where it displays positive outcomes. These results will be reported to the departmental Assessment Committee.

The Assessment Committee will confer and will produce a report summarizing these results and including suggestions for future improvement. In order to insure that the results have a useful impact on future instruction, the Committee will circulate its suggestions to all those who are teaching core courses in the coming academic year and will, in subsequent years, examine whether improvement has been noted.

3. Reporting of results

Instructors of courses at the relevant level will receive suggestions for improvement from the Assessment Committee prior to the next academic year.

Annual results in the form of a descriptive report from the departmental Assessment Committee will be delivered by June 1 to the Dean of Fulbright College.

Results of analysis of assessment of Student Learning Outcomes – Core Courses
PHIL2003 Introduction to Philosophy; PHIL2103 Introduction to Ethics
AY 2019-2020

Core Program Goals
> Students in Philosophy core courses will:
> - Improve critical reading, writing, thinki2ng, and argumentative skills of the kind useful in philosophy and all subjects;
> - Develop a basic understanding of the discipline of philosophy through studying a diversity of major issues and of major historical figures.

Student Learning Outcomes
> Students in Philosophy core courses will:
> - Gain practice in evaluating arguments;
> - Gain skill in reading difficult and diverse philosophical texts;
> - Develop skills in writing with clarity, depth and coherence;
> - Gain understanding of specific issues and figures in philosophy;
> - Gain practice in evaluating their own ideas and presuppositions, as well as other, possibly divergent, values and points of view.

Means of assessment and desired level of student achievement for core courses:
> Students are regularly assessed on the basis of written work in the form of papers and essay exams.
> For purposes of assessment of program goals and outcomes, papers will be collected from a selection of core courses (PHIL2003, Introduction to Philosophy, and PHIL2103, Introduction to Ethics). This procedure will be implemented more comprehensively during 2020-2021. Instructor compliance for the past year was not good, perhaps because of disruptions from the changeover to remote teaching.
> In addition, for the large lecture course PHIL2003C, students will take a pre- and post-test on the basis of which their performance will be evaluated.
> Each instructor will summarize these numerical scores and write a brief report on where students' work shows need for improvement and where it displays positive outcomes. These results will be reported to the departmental Assessment Committee.

I. Assessment by instructors of student work:
> Instructors in selected courses evaluated grade papers and exams on the two dimensions of:
> 1) Critical thinking, communication and writing skills, including but not limited to:
> - The student writes with clarity and accuracy;
> - The student displays care in understanding a diversity of positions and values with accuracy and fairness and in presenting his or her own ideas clearly and in ways that are relevant to his or her main points;
> - The student shows the ability to analyze and evaluate arguments;
> - The student proceeds critically in examining his or her own presuppositions and assumptions.
> 2) Knowledge and understanding of content, including but not limited to:

- The student's written work displays understanding of central concepts and terminology;
- The student's written work shows a grasp of basic ideas in the areas of philosophy under consideration and their application;
- The student begins to explore historically important positions and figures where relevant;
- The student's thinking on the issues shows gains in coherence, breadth and depth.

Student work was evaluated by giving a numerical score of 0-3 to each of these two dimensions, using the following scale:

0) Does not meet expectations;
1) Minimally meets expectations;
2) Meets expectations well, with room for improvement;
3) Exceeds expectations.

Results of Instructor Assessment:

PHIL2003C: Students in PHIL2003C, the large lecture section of Introduction to Philosophy (approximately 360 students/semester), scored, on a test early in the semester, 2.64 out of 10 on a pretest and 6.88 out of 10 on a post-test.

This represented improvement in both categories of knowledge and critical thinking, but in general, students were better at identifying and understanding positions on issues that they were at assessing the reasoning behind conclusions (both to their own arguments and those of others).

PHIL2003 and PHIL2003H: In Introduction to Philosophy, instructors scored assignments from late in the course in accord with the rubric and gave a prose assessment of learning outcomes. Approximately 40 students were scored, representing a decline in instructor compliance from the previous year.

Average score on dimension 1 (critical thinking and communication skills): 2.42 of 3
Average score on dimension 2 (content): 2.42 of 3

These scores represent improvement from the preceding year, when the sample size was larger.

PHIL2103C: New data was not gathered for this class in 2020. In the previous year, students (160 total) in this course, the large Introduction to Ethics lecture course, were scored on comprehensive pre- and post-tests. They scored 25% on the pretest and 75% on the post-test. This reflected progress on both knowledge of the material (dimension 2) and ability to assess its implications (dimension 1).

II. Summary Results and Suggestions for Improvement from Assessment Committee:

The departmental Assessment Committee had the following observations about student performance in introductory (core) courses:

- Students displayed a good overall grasp of the content of arguments and theories and, in many cases, their application to real-world problems
- Instructors found improvement over the course of the term in understanding and explaining philosophical ideas – in particular, in reading comprehension.

- Students need more guidance in focusing on particular arguments and critical points. In particular, all instructors thought that more *creative* critical thinking was called for.
- Students need more practice in articulating their positions, assessing them from different points of view, developing and responding to objections to their own views – again, the marks of creative and critical philosophical work, even at the introductory level.

Also in consultation with instructors, the departmental Assessment Committee developed the following suggestions for improvement in core and introductory courses. These will be conveyed to all instructors of the relevant courses in AY2020-2021:
- Students benefit from "practice assignments" prior to the first graded written assignments and from optional review sessions.
- To improve argumentative and critical skills, it is useful to break down written tasks into a series of clearly demarcated steps.
- On the other hand, students need to be given direction in going beyond a "fill in the blank" approach – to use imagination and critical thinking in exploring and assessing their positions and those of others.
- Creative critical reasoning is enhanced by student participation in discussion and by discussing written work with the professor prior to submitting it.