

Academic Assessment Report
Department of Philosophy, Fulbright College, University of Arkansas
Core Courses
May, 2016

Results of analysis of assessment of Student Learning Outcomes – Core Courses

Core 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.

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 AY2016-2017.

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. Core Courses: 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 (Fall 2016), the large lecture section of Introduction to Philosophy (approximately 360 students/semester), scored 2.38/10 on a pretest, and 6.74/10 on a post-test.

Students in PHIL2003C (Spring 2017) scored 2.63/10 on a pretest and 6.15/10 on a post-test.

For both Fall and Spring, margins between pre- and post-tests were significantly higher than 2015-2016 margins.

PHIL2003: In addition, several written reports were received from sections of PHIL2003 Introduction to Philosophy, in which instructors scored assignments in accord with the rubric and gave a prose assessment of learning outcomes. Approximately 200 students were scored.

Average score on dimension 1 (critical thinking and communication skills): 2.05 of 3

Average score on dimension 2 (content): 2.10 of 3

These scores were not significantly different from the preceding year; the sample size was larger

II. Core Courses: 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 arguments and theories.
- Instructors found a marked 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.

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 AY2016-2017:

- Students benefit from “practice assignments” prior to the first graded written assignments; early graded assignments should be returned in a timely fashion and from optional review sessions.
- To improve argumentative and critical skills, it may be useful in giving and explaining assignments to break down written tasks into a series of clearly demarcated steps.
- Creative critical reasoning is enhanced by student participation in discussion and by discussing written work with the professor prior to submitting it.