

## **Results of analysis of assessment of Student Learning Outcomes – Philosophy Majors**

Students in PHIL3983, the Capstone Course for Philosophy Majors, were assessed on the basis of written work, including a lengthy final position paper; and participation in class.

### **I. Assessment by instructor of student work:**

Assessment included detailed comments from the instructor and numerical ratings on the following dimensions and learning outcomes:

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

- The student writes with clarity and accuracy;
- The student displays care in understanding positions 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 ability and sophistication in the analysis and evaluation of arguments;
- The student proceeds critically in examining his or her own presuppositions and assumptions.

2) Increased 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 main trends and theories in the areas under consideration and their application;
- The student understands historically important positions and figures where relevant;
- The student's thinking on the issues shows significant coherence, breadth and depth.

Student work was evaluated along these dimensions on the following scale:

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

**Average score on dimension 1** (critical thinking and communication skills): 2.1

**Average score on dimension 2** (content): 2.1

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

The departmental Assessment Committee, in consultation with the instructor of the Capstone Course, had the following observations:

1. With a high degree of uniformity, students did well at assimilating and summarizing the content of the issues and positions dealt with in the course. The course was taught at a high level and on comprehension, students performed impressively.
2. While students varied significantly in their ability to express and argue for their own conclusions, for the most part their performance met, but did not exceed, expectations.
3. All students needed work in anticipating and responding to potential objections to and

problems with their stated views.

4. Therefore, students would have been well-advised to focus their arguments more precisely and to develop the specific implications of their views more carefully.

5. 3 and 4 suggest an ongoing need for instructors to consider how to develop “creative critical thinking” that is more “bold and adventurous” (quotes from instructor reports). See suggestion 3 below.

Also in consultation with the instructor, the departmental Assessment Committee developed the following suggestions for improvement in this and similar level courses:

1. Students should be given instruction in focusing their position papers more specifically.

2. All instructors in courses aimed at majors should continue to emphasize the abilities to anticipate and respond to objections and fairly to characterize those views which the student is responding to, contesting or opposing.

3. In the interest of producing more ambitious written work, students need to be willing to be risk averse and to learn from their mistakes. One way to achieve this would be to encourage or require them to submit drafts of papers for feedback prior to handing in final versions.

This feedback will be reported to all faculty who are teaching 3000 and 4000 level courses in Fall 2016 and Spring 2017.

#### **Changes to degree planned or made on the basis of the assessment and analysis**

The department has added the Capstone Course to the courses that satisfy its writing requirement.