

**Academic Assessment Report—Programs**  
**Department of Philosophy, Fulbright College, University of Arkansas**  
**May, 2018**

**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): 2.3

**Average score on dimension 2** (content): 2.2

**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:

- Students did well at assimilating 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.

- 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.
- The instructor observes first, that some students still have difficulty with the idea of a research paper, not knowing how to engage with academic literature rather than just offering their own musings; and second, that some students have problems determining the central content of the course as opposed to focusing on more tangential issues.

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

- Students should be given instruction in focusing their position papers more specifically.
- 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.
- 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 2018 and Spring 2019

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

The department continues to encourage all instructors to have extensive writing assignments for their courses and to review written work with students both before and after papers have been graded.

**Academic Assessment Report**  
**Department of Philosophy, Fulbright College, University of Arkansas**  
**Master's Degree**  
**May, 2018**

Master's students are assessed mainly on the basis of their Master's thesis, to be completed by the end of the second year. Advisors provide prose reports of their assessments of theses. No reports have been filed on newly completed Master's theses. Summarizing from last year's results:

Master's theses vary widely in length, breadth, depth and overall quality. On the whole, students display a good grasp of their subject matter. There is room for improvement in focusing on specific positions and arguments.

Advisors should encourage students to have "models" in mind – a Master's thesis should have the scope of a long and substantial journal article. In addition, students should be encouraged to submit work periodically and in small chunks to get feedback and direction.

This input will be delivered to all who are supervising Master's theses.

**Academic Assessment Report**  
**Department of Philosophy, Fulbright College, University of Arkansas**  
**Doctoral Degree**  
**May, 2018**

Doctoral students are assessed mainly on the basis of their dissertations. Advisors provide prose reports of their assessments of dissertations. Two dissertations were completed during the relevant time period. One was outstanding – exceeding expectations on dimensions of both critical thinking and contribution to our understanding of its topics. The other was well-written and comprehensive but disorganized in parts; its contribution was substantial but suffered somewhat for clarity.

Dissertation supervisors should encourage students to submit work in small pieces for purposes of feedback, discussion and direction. Students should be encouraged to present portions of their research to the Department or at conferences in order to gauge their progress and to get better at explaining their projects.