Philosophy Program Assessment Report

Narrative:

The faculty who teach in the Philosophy Program are committed to the mission of Georgia Perimeter College. To that end, the program assessment goals are intended to strengthen student success. These goals foster a culture of teamwork as faculty collaborate in the assessment process and offer feedback and suggestions for course improvement based upon the results. The Philosophy Program enhances the economic, social, and cultural vitality of our communities by assisting students in completing their associates degree requirements prior to transferring to four-year institutions and by encouraging them to use their reasoning skills outside the classroom environment. The program also offers philosophy courses in different manners of delivery to support the College’s goal to expand access and enrollment capacity.

Assessment Goals

1. Students produce well-organized communication that exhibits logical thinking and organization, uses appropriate style for a particular audience, and meets conventional standards of usage.

2. Students demonstrate effective problem-solving and critical thinking skills through interpreting, presenting or evaluating philosophical arguments.

3. Students effectively explain the importance of philosophy in the human experience by examining the values, attitudes, beliefs, and habits that define the nature and quality of life.

4. Students effectively analyze global economic, political, historical, cultural or geographic forces by recognizing and appreciating human diversity (both past and present) as well as the diversity of ideas, institutions, philosophies, moral codes, and ethical principles.

Assessment of PHIL 2030 “Introduction To Ethics” (Fall, 2009)

Process / Explanation of Findings

The assessment consisted of two parts.

1. For the first part, students in all sections of PHIL 2030 spent 15-20 minutes of a class period toward the end of the Fall, 2009 semester filling out a questionnaire (which can be found under “Assessment Tools,” on this Web site). The rationale for the questionnaire was to get a handle on the students' own perceptions of how much they had learned. At our session, we looked at roughly 60 questionnaires. Of the first nine questions, we were happy that, overwhelmingly, the students responded by either “agreeing completely” or “agreeing somewhat” (either A or B). On the whole students felt that they were able to demonstrate knowledge of several ethical theories, are able to demonstrate the meaningfulness of ethical discourse, and can better analyze, express and defend their own
ethical views. Students also felt that their intellectual skills improved as well as a result of completing the various assignments given in the course. For the last question (#10) we gave the students the opportunity to write in their own comments about the course. There was no real persistent theme across the responses. A few students wanted more debates, others voiced their opinions about the textbooks (some positive, some negative) while others simply left it blank. We discussed some of the ways in which we instructors engage our students in the course.

2. The goal of the second part of the assessment was to allow the philosophy faculty to come to our own conclusions about how much the students are learning. For this, students in all sections of the two courses wrote an essay, chosen from a set of three (found under “Assessment Tools”). This exercise took up one hour of their two-hour final exams. Since the course covers main traditions in ethical theory such as Aristotelian virtue theory, Kantian deontology, Mill's utilitarianism, rights theory, relativism, etc, and includes an effort to connect the works of these historical positions with contemporary debates in moral philosophy, the essay questions consisted of a few "cases" for the students to analyze from several different philosophical viewpoints and was not strict exegesis. At bottom, the essay questions consisted of topics that would have been covered in all sections of 2120 - other possible course topics were left to the individual instructors to cover in the other hour of their final exams, as the instructors saw fit. All sections of the courses used the same set of essays. Face-to-face sections completed the essays closed-book, but the online sections completed them open-book since there is simply no way to enforce a closed-book policy.

At our session, we read 20 essays, chosen randomly, from the both the online and face to face sections. To norm the data we used one common grading scale for all these sections. (See Grading Rubric,” under “Assessment Tools.”” We evaluators certainly saw room for improvement all around. There was not a significant difference between the online samples and the face to face samples.

Generally, we found that students (1) needed to compare and contrast more sharply, (2) needed to show more substantively precisely how the philosophers in question supported their points with arguments, and (3) many students were not able to provide an account of how the philosophers developed their points; choosing to focus instead on simply stating what the philosophers believed. Finally, we found (4) many students simply needed to structure their essays better.

Action Taken / Improvements Resulting From Assessment

As a group, we faculty agreed to work on these points with our students' writing the next time we taught these courses by better foregrounding skills such as “comparing and contrasting” as well as spending even more time discussing different forms of argumentation and how to identify arguments in a given philosophical text. We also agreed that our students need to write even more in the Ethics course. Faculty who did not attend the evaluating session were urged to enact these changes as well.
Assessment of PHIL 2020 “Logic and Critical Thinking” (Fall, 2010)

Process / Explanation of Findings

The assessment consisted of two parts:

1. For the first part, students in all sections of PHIL 2020 spent 15-20 minutes of a class period toward the end of the Fall, 2010 semester filling out a questionnaire (under “Assessment Tools, on this Web site). The rationale for the questionnaire was to get a handle on the students' own perceptions of how much they had learned.

2. The goal of the second part of the assessment was to allow the philosophy faculty to come to our own conclusions about how much the students are learning. For this, students in all sections of the course read an opinion piece and evaluated it. This exercise took up one hour of their two-hour final exams. This assessment instrument (see “Assessment Tools”) was chosen because identification and analysis of argumentation would have been covered in all sections of 2020 - other possible course topics were left to the individual instructors to cover in the other hour of their final exams, as the instructors saw fit. All sections of the courses used the same set of op-eds as well as the same series of questions that walked the students through the identification and analysis of the argument. Face-to-face sections completed the essays closed-book, but the online sections completed them open-book since there is simply no way to enforce a closed-book policy.

At our session, we read 20 essays, chosen randomly, from the both the online and face to face sections. To norm the data we used one common grading scale (1-3) for all sections.

We evaluators certainly saw room for improvement all around. There was not a significant difference between the online samples and the face to face samples.

Generally, we found that students (1) were often challenged by the language and terminology of critical thinking used in the course, be it in the textbook or supplementary reading (2) at times needed to show more substantively precisely how the authors in question supported their points with arguments and (3) many students were not able (or willing) to provide an account of how the authors developed their points; choosing to focus instead on simply stating what they thought the author believed. Finally, we found (4) many students confused truth with validity and had trouble distinguishing inductive forms of reasoning from deductive forms.

Action Taken / Improvements Resulting From Assessment

As a group, we faculty agreed to work on these points with our students' writing the next time we taught these courses by better foregrounding skills such as “argument mapping” as well as spending even more time discussing different forms of argumentation/reasoning and how to identify arguments, both formal and informal. We also agreed that our students need to do even more reading and writing the Logic and Critical Thinking course. Faculty who did not attend the evaluating session were urged to enact these changes as well.
Assessment of PHIL 2010 and 2010 H, “Survey of Philosophical Thought” (Fall, 2011)

Process / Explanation of Findings

The assessment consisted of two parts.

1. For the first part, students in all sections of PHIL 2010 and PHIL 2010 H spent 15-20 minutes of a class period toward the end of the Fall, 2011 semester filling out a questionnaire (see “Assessment Tools” section of this Web site). The rationale for the questionnaire was to get a handle on the students' own perceptions of how much they had learned.

2. The goal of the second part of the assessment was to allow the philosophy faculty to come to our own conclusions about how much the students are learning. For this, students in all sections of the two courses wrote an essay, chosen from a set of three (see “Assessment Tools”). This exercise took up one hour of their two-hour final exams. All sections of the courses used the same set of essays. Face-to-face sections completed the essays closed-book, but the online sections completed them open-book since there is simply no way to enforce a closed-book policy.

At our session, we read 20 essays, chosen randomly, from the both the online and face to face sections. To norm the data we used one common grading scale (1 is inadequate, 2 is acceptable-3 is excellent) for all these sections.

Summary of the PHIL 2010 Assessment:
Regular: 50% scored a 2 or better (1: 10, 2: 8, 3: 2)
Honors: 85% scored a 2 or better (1: 1, 2: 6, 3: 1)

We were not satisfied with the results in the regular sections of PHIL 2010. Generally, we found that students (1) needed to compare and contrast more sharply and (2) needed to show more substantively precisely how the philosophers in question supported their points with arguments and (3) many students were not able to provide an account of how the philosophers developed their points; choosing to focus instead on simply stating what the philosophers believed. Finally, we found (4) many students simply needed to structure their essays better.

We also found a significant difference between the online samples and the face to face samples. The online students appeared to perform worse, overall. The committee discussed possible reasons for this; esp., the time factor, an issue with the instrument, and considered if we were asking too much.

Action Taken / Improvements Resulting From Assessment

As a group, we faculty agreed to work on these points with our students' writing the next time we taught these courses by better foregrounding skills such as “comparing and contrasting” as well as spending even more time discussing different forms of argumentation and how to identify
arguments in a given philosophical text. We also agreed that our students need to write as much as possible in the course. Faculty who did not attend the evaluating session were urged to enact these changes as well.

While we feel that the pedagogical design instruments, apart from proctoring, provide adequate guarantees that the integrity of the educational process is not being compromised, the committee recommends that online Philosophy final exams be proctored and closed book to guarantee original work. Our wager is that online students will succeed in higher rates if they are solely focusing on writing rather than worrying about the open book format. In the end, we feel proctoring provides a reliable means of assessment and equally as important, it provides motivation for the student to prepare and master the material. A proctored format would bring the online sections into conformity with how the campus courses are being assessed.