**Philosophy Major Assessment Report**

AY 2015-2016

August 22, 2016

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| 1. **Learning Outcomes Assessed**

LO2: Defend a specific thesis in writing using logical argumentation and authoritative evidence.LO2: Understand basic logic underlying ideas, values, and approaches in philosophy and religionLO3: Recognize critical thinking employed in texts, traditions, arguments, and ideasLO4: Contribute an act of service that involves engaged dialogueLO4: Practice tolerance and dialogueWe completed two major assessment activities that covered most of our Learning Outcomes. The first activity, Senior Seminar Review, focused on LO2 and LO3. The second activity, Voicing Ideas Review, had a few components that covered LO4 and LO2, with LO1 and LO3 incidentally addressed.  |
| 1. **Assessment Instruments Used**

**Activity 1. Senior Seminar Review** **Procedure**: For the first activity, the Department Chair and Assessment Coordinator read 6 (of the 21 enrolled students) randomly selected essays from the required senior seminar. We looked for signs of LO2 (Understand basic logic underlying ideas, values, and approaches in philosophy and religion) and LO3 (Recognize critical thinking employed in texts, traditions, arguments, and ideas). We independently rated each as 1- inadequate or poor, 2 – adequate or good, or 3 – excellent. Then we met to discuss our findings. This activity is the first of our regular direct measures from our SOAP. It serves well to measure the outcome as a random blind review by multiple faculty other than the course instructor, reading for these outcomes and not just for what the instructor assigned, offers direct evidence of degrees of student success at the end of the major. **Benchmarks**: Since this is the senior seminar course where our majors are expected to achieve all learning outcomes at advanced stages, we except that 85% of students should be marked 2 or 3, or only 15% inadequate or poor, and we expect that 25% are 3s. **Activity 2: Voicing Ideas Review** **Procedure**: Our annual student symposium invites students to submit papers written for upper division philosophy courses, and if selected they present them at an afternoon showcase. Faculty participate in blind review to select the best of the submissions. This assessment exercise had three parts, reflecting the third direct measure from our SOAP. This event offers excellent opportunities for substantial assessment in many areas as the process from submission to speaking reflects the sum total of learning outcomes for any philosophy major. 1. The submission rate assesses LOC 4, as students should be able to “contribute an act of service that involves engaged dialogue.” We looked at how many students submitted papers to the symposium.
2. The review process assesses LOC 2, as “students should be able to defend a specific thesis in writing using logical argumentation and authoritative evidence.” But depending on the specific content of each essay, reviewers might be able to see evidence, or a lack of evidence, of LOCs 1 and 3 incidentally. Reviewers are asked:

Please mark "yes" or "no," as to whether you believe the paper should be presented at the conference, and, if you wish, a "score" using this scale:5: exceptional4: excellent3: good2: average /adequate 1. poor / incomplete For assessment, we looked at the acceptance rate and at reviewers’ comments to see where students were succeeding and where not. 1. At the event, faculty paid attention especially to LOC 4 in handling Q&A and in the students participating. Then we discussed what we saw, whether students could “practice tolerance and dialogue” but hoping also to see bits of LOCs 1, 2, and 3 in that the content of the questions and answers would be richly philosophical.

**Benchmarks**: 1. Submissions: We expect to receive 15 submissions, which would be approximately 10% of all philosophy majors plus a few extra for minors and those enrolled in upper division GE courses.
2. Review: We expect that choosing participants should be difficult.
	1. 34% should to be solid yeses, ranked 4 or 5.
	2. 33% acceptable, ranked 3s.
	3. 33% unacceptable, ranked 2 or 1.
3. Event: We expect that students in the audience are able to ask questions of the speakers and that the speakers can respond to both student and faculty questions for the 10+ minutes allocated for Q&A for each speaker.
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| 1. **Discoveries**

**Activity 1. Senior Seminar Review*** Both Chair and Assessment Coordinator had very similar assessments of each paper resulting in identical scores on our rough rubric:
	+ 1 paper scored 1, inadequate/poor
	+ 3 papers scored 2, adequate/good
	+ 2 papers scored 3, excellent
* While six of twenty one might not be the best representative sample, it suggests we are hitting our benchmark since
	+ 1/6 = 16% inadequate, right at the benchmark 15%
	+ 5/6 = 84% at least adequate, right at the benchmark 85%
	+ 2/6 = 33% excellent, above the hoped for 25%
* We noted that plenty of students could still do well to proofread better and most have more typos and grammar errors than we wish to see but which don’t disrupt reader comprehension. One student is still struggling with basic writing and sometimes might be trying so hard to mimic the style of academic writing that is far out of reach leaving the essay much more confused and confusing than simple writing would be.
* But we were especially pleased to see the quality of work here knowing that this assignment required students to write about an article they had yet discussed in class. Thus, almost everything they summarized was of their own doing, with no assistance from class notes or discussions. That the bar was high and most made it over indicates our students’ abilities are more than adequate.
* The papers did well to include appropriate terminology for the field, but only some were careful to define these key terms and demonstrate more understanding than just including them in the paper. One paper even relied heavily on quotes more so than their own thinking or their own efforts and summary and paraphrasing. This was made more obvious by one of the really excellent papers that did carefully define the key terms.
* Every paper also included some sort of critical evaluation, even of varying degrees of thoroughness, thoughtfulness, and accuracy. We are pleased to see that our students know the difference between comprehending and evaluating and have their own voices too.

**Activity 2: Voicing Ideas Review** 1. Submissions:
	1. Our submission rate was well below the benchmark. We received 5 of the 15 expected submissions. Further, these were from only 4 students as one person submitted two papers (on the recommendation of two faculty members).
	2. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they are afraid to submit, afraid their papers aren’t good enough to be accepted, even if they earned A grades in their courses.
2. Review: Our acceptance rate was also well below the benchmark. This year we accepted only 2 even though we had 4 in past years, but they weren’t more worthy. Further, no papers scored 4 or 5. The highest score given was 3.5. While reviewers did give “maybe”s to two papers, only two received “yes” scores from both reviewers. Here’s the raw scores from the blind review process:
	* 1. 3, 3.5 Yes
		2. 1, 2 No, maybe
		3. 1.5, 1 No
		4. 1, 3 No, maybe
		5. 3.5, 3 Yes
3. Event: This was quite successful.
	1. Both presenters had thoughtful, engaging papers that generated good questions from the audience, from students in the audience, and they both did very well with their responses to the questions.
	2. Attendance at the event as good, especially considering that, due to conflicts, the date was adjusted late in the semester to a Friday afternoon. There were
		1. between 20 and 25 students, including some from Fresno City College
		2. 7 philosophy faculty and 3 faculty members from other departments
		3. 5 community members
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| 1. **Changes Made and Planned**

**Activity 1. Senior Seminar Review**1. This exercise, not unlike others in the recent past, suggests that there is too much overlap in these two learning outcomes and in the subpoints describing each, since both expect that students “understand and employ” or “identity and apply” skills. But some students were better at understanding and others were better at evaluating. Just claiming the students are adequate (for achieving part of each LO) is not the best tool for quality assessment. We should edit the LOs to clarify and distinguish these different outcomes.
2. We should share the results of this exercise with faculty not in attendance and reflect together about the differences and relations between comprehension of others’ ideas and construction of our own. We should encourage more faculty to participate in the assessment directly.
3. We should expand the sample size of essays to assess.

**Activity 2: Voicing Ideas Review**1. The following are some ideas to get more student involvement, especially from students we except will fare better in the review process, as we know that there are more than 15 papers good enough to be included in the symposium, let alone to be submitted.
	1. Add a formal commentator for each paper. Newer students can practice participating before they submit for full participation.
	2. We need faculty to be more involved in exciting and encouraging students for the event.
		1. Consider a faculty nomination format so that students don’t have to make the decision to submit on their own.
		2. Ask faculty to include statements in syllabi so that they are alert to the event from the beginning of the semester. We can especially indicate which assignments are likely to result in papers worthy of submission, in length, format, and content.
		3. Get a dedicated Faculty Organizer who can work more diligently and consistently throughout the semester to get the students involved.
	3. We could get the Philosophy Club more involved too, as these are the most involved students already. More of them should be submitting, but they can also help in
		1. Advertising and encouraging submissions and attendance at the symposium
		2. Practicing informal sharing of their papers so that the symposium isn’t so intimidating
		3. As official commenters for papers
	4. We could open it up to students from all over Fresno County, even to the Community College district, for more submissions and to encourage our students to compete and interact with other students. This was the practice in the somewhat recent past; we could bring it back.
2. We could create and collect an audience assessment/evaluation form.
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| 1. **Assessment Activities for 2016-2017 AY**

Next year we will complete Direct Measures 4 and 5: Assess LO1 and LO4 in PHIL 199 (Pre-Law Internship) and LO1 and LO3 in lower division major course, probably PHIL 25 or 45. At least two faculty members will read assignments completed for those courses to evaluate according to our own rubric for assessing those specific Learning Outcomes. We will also repeat the assessment of our Voicing Ideas event as it is always helpful to the entire department to see what this capstone events reveals. And we will repeat assessment of the senior seminar.  |
| 1. **Action Plan Progress**
2. Recruit faculty to bolster expertise in Religious Studies, Bioethics, and Cognitive Science and to service General Education Expanding General Education offerings:
	1. Two new faculty begin this semester in Philosophy of Law, and each comes with other specialties as well to further service both GE and majors.
	2. A new search is underway to hire in Philosophy of Science for 2017-18.
	3. We are adjusting teaching of general education classes, including offering large lecture courses for introductory level courses.
3. Serve the Region in Value Inquiry, including Religious and Ethical Topics
	1. Members of the department helped organize and participate in a public philosophy event at the Woodward Park Library in Fall 2015. Planning continues for more similar events.
	2. The Ethics Center Lecture series continues to draw good crowds from campus and the community, including our participation in the David Brooks event with a reading group organized in advance of his visit.
	3. One faculty member presented a paper at the Central Valley Philosophical Association annual meeting, again held in Fresno in Fall 2015. Other faculty, students, and community members attended.
4. Increase the number of Religious Studies majors
	1. The department helped to designate an inter-faith meditation room in the library.
	2. We continue to brainstorm ways to increase our majors.
5. Contribute to the Interdisciplinary Cognitive Science Program
	1. Many other departments are moving away from this program. We are hiring in Philosophy of Science with consideration also on teaching Cognitive Science specifically.
6. Update the SOAP and continue working on Student Outcomes Assessment
	1. The department completed many assessment activities (two for the major and two for GE) this year, and they helped to reveal concrete directions to take in the revision. We should have revisions this year to the SOAP.
7. 2015-16 Plan:
	1. We will work to reinvigorate the Student Philosophy Club, Phi Alpha Delta, and other student groups.
		1. End of year participation in Philosophy Club was up. Officer elections for 16-17 year saw multiple people running for all three positions.
		2. With new hires in Phil of Law, Phi Alpha Delta will have a new Faculty Advisor this year, after years without a proper specialist for them.
	2. We will work to discuss common pedagogical strategies and grading rubrics—to avoid grade inflation and respond to concerns about cheating and plagiarism.
		1. In Spring 2016 we had a very successful meeting of all faculty teaching our two most enrolled GE courses, including part-time faculty, to discuss coherence and consistency in our syllabi as well as pedagogy in general.
	3. We will aim to hire an assistant professor in Philosophy of Law who can work to integrate the pre-law courses with the rest of our curriculum.
		1. We hired two.

What we will do in 2016-2017 * Revise SOAP
* Look more closely at Religious Studies Option and all Department Major requirements, focusing on reviewing our major advising practices.
* Hire in Philosophy of Science
* Develop a department colloquium, to increase collegiality and model for students the activities of an intellectual community.
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