

# **Student Outcomes Assessment Plan (SOAP)**

**Department of Philosophy  
California State University, Fresno**

**Updated Spring 2011**

I. Mission Statement

II. Goals and Specific Learning Outcomes

III. Curriculum Map

IV. Assessment Projects and Rubrics

V. Results

VI. Closing the Loop

## **I. Mission**

The mission of the Philosophy Department is to be the beacon of the life of the mind in the region we serve. We aim to foster the love of wisdom in a variety of ways: through our curricular offerings in both General Education and in the Philosophy major, through our interactions with students in mentoring and advising, through our scholarship, and through our engagement with the community.

To carry out this mission, the department provides a Philosophy Major as well as Options to the Major in Pre-Law and in Religious Studies. Additionally, we serve majors and non-majors alike with a broad offering of General Education courses and electives. Drawing upon the texts and traditions of the global philosophical quest for meaning and understanding, our program serves to expand students' intellectual horizons, foster life-long learning, and prepare them for further professional study. Lastly, through our programs in the Eastern and Western traditions in philosophy and religious studies, we instill within our students an informed appreciation of cultures other than their own.

## **II. Goals and learning outcomes**

Philosophy students should be able to:

1. Understand and appreciate the significance of philosophy and religion in human affairs
  - a. Students should be able to explain the history of Western philosophy from Parmenides to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
  - b. Students should be able to explain philosophical areas/topics: Logic, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Value Theory
  - c. Students should be able to describe and explain major religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism
2. Understand and appreciate the plurality and diversity of philosophical and religious traditions
  - a. Student should recognize the importance of diverse methodologies and traditions
  - b. Students should appreciate the need for tolerance and dialogue
  - c. Students should understand criticisms of overly simplistic, monological reductionism
  - d. Student should understand critics of relativism
3. Analyze and interpret texts, traditions, arguments, and ideas
  - a. Student should be able to employ and explain basic exegetical and hermeneutical methodologies
  - b. Students should be able situate a text within its historical context
  - c. Student should be able to reconstruct dialogues/debates among philosophers and traditions (e.g., empiricism v. rationalism, etc.)
4. Critically evaluate arguments, ideas, values, and approaches in philosophy and religion.
  - a. Students should understand basic logic and employ it to reconstruct, criticize, and evaluate arguments
  - b. Students should be able to defend a thesis in writing
  - c. Students should be able to engage in oral debate
  - d. Students should be able to openly and tolerantly explore ideas concerning religious belief, ethical commitment, and worldviews

### III. Curriculum Maps

“I” = Introduced; “R” = Reinforced; “A” = Advanced

Course	LO 1 Identify philosophical and/or religious ideas, theories, and traditions.	LO 2 Recognize differences among philosophical and/or religious ideas and traditions.	LO 3 Demonstrate analytical and interpretive skills.	LO 4 Critically evaluate arguments, ideas, values, and approaches.
1	I	I	I	I
2	I	I	I	I
10	I	I	I	I
20	I	I	I	I
25	I	I	I	I
28	I	I	R	R
45	I	I	I	I
101	R	R	R	R
103	R	R	R	R
105	R	R	R	R
107	R	R	R	R
108	R	R	R	R
110	R	R	R	R
115	R	R	R	R
118	R	R	R	R
120	R	R	R	R
121	R	R	R	R
122	R	R	R	R
125	R	R	R	R
127	R	R	R	R
129	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
130	R	R	R	R
131	R	R	R	R
132	R	R	R	R
133W	R	R	R	R
134	R	R	R	R
135	R	R	R	R
136	R	R	R	R
137	R	R	R	R
138	R	R	R	R
140	R	R	R	R
145	R	R	A	A
146	R	R	A	A

150	R	R	R	R
156	R	R	R	R
157	R	R	R	R
165T	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
170T	A	A	A	A
172T	A	A	A	A

#### IV. Assessment Projects and Rubrics

In the Spring Semester of 2011, we will complete three assessment projects:

1. Analysis of Term Papers from Phil 170T: The Senior Seminar in Philosophy

##### Rubric for evaluation

Contains Clear and Specific Philosophical Argument	Demonstrates engagement with quoted materials	Demonstrates familiarity with breadth of the discipline
5—excellent argument with crystal clear thesis and extensive defense	5—extensive use of textual resources with insightful, accurate, and interesting interpretation	5—wide ranging and insightful recognition of diverse historical and methodological connections and implications
4—good argument with clear argument and defense	4—good use of textual resources with interesting interpretation	4—good recognition of recognition of diverse historical and methodological connections and implications
3—adequate argument with some problems either in thesis or defense	3—adequate use of textual resources with adequate interpretation	3—adequate recognition of diverse historical and methodological connections and implications
2—weak argument with unclear thesis or inadequate defense	2—little use of textual resources or inadequate interpretation	2—inadequate recognition of diverse historical and methodological connections and implications
1—bad argument; no thesis	1—no use of textual resources	1—no recognition of recognition of diverse historical and methodological connections and implications

Dr. Fiala's Evaluation of Course Papers from M. Anagnostopoulos' Phil 170T class from Fall 2010

Papers Evaluated by Fiala	Contains Clear and Specific Philosophical Argument (5 point scale, with 5 the highest)	Demonstrates engagement with quoted materials	Demonstrates familiarity with breadth of the discipline
W..	5	5	3
Br..	4	5	3
M..	3	4	2
Ba..	5	5	3
H..	4	4	3
M..	3	4	2
Total	36	39	36
Average	3.6	3.9	3.6
Percentage (out of 5 point scale)	0.72	0.68	0.72

Dr. Biondo's Evaluation of Course Papers from M. Anagnostopoulos' Phil 170T class from Fall 2010

Papers Evaluated by Biondo	Contains Clear and Specific Philosophical Argument (5 point scale, with 5 the highest)	Demonstrates engagement with quoted materials	Demonstrates familiarity with breadth of the discipline
W..	3	5	4
Br..	3	5	3
M..	2	3	1
Ba..	4	4	2
H..	4	3	3
M..	2	4	2
Total	18	24	15
Average	3	4	2.5
Percentage (out of 5 point scale)	60%	80%	50%

## 1. Analysis of Term Papers from Phil 170T: The Senior Seminar in Philosophy

Results of Assessment meeting May 2011: Fiala and Biondo

Since we began this assessment method in 2008 our students have consistently demonstrated a broad familiarity with the discipline as well as the ability to identify authoritative sources in support of philosophical argumentation. The skill we identified as the most important area for improvement in teaching and learning is the specificity and clarity of the philosophical argumentation.

From Spring 2008 to Fall 2010 the ability of our students to quote authoritative evidence in support of a philosophical argument has improved 12%. This is the direct result of faculty discussions about what constitutes effective writing in department meetings and breakout sessions. Department faculty should pay more attention to the breadth of the discipline. The papers evaluated were about classical philosophy, but some reference to non-classical philosophy or contemporary context could be incorporated into the writing assignment. Similar to our results from two years ago, faculty and students need to devote at least part of one class meeting to the specificity and clarity of thesis statements. The department is planning a thesis workshop for faculty at the start of the Fall, 2011 semester.

2. Analysis of General Education Course: Phil 20 (associated with G.E. Assessment)

**Report of GE Assessment – Philosophy 20**

**Spring 2011**

Professors Anagnostopoulos and Fiala met on May 12, 2011 to analyze materials from Philosophy 20 in terms of the following **learning outcome**:

"Reflect critically and systematically on questions concerning beliefs, values and the nature of existence."

They randomly selected 12 students from each of two sections of Phil 20 and looked at two pieces of work from each student that covered the same ethical theory: a quiz on ethical egoism and the portion of the midterm exam that focused on ethical egoism.

The scores from these two pieces of work were analyzed in terms of the **rubric** created for this analysis:

1. **Outstanding:** The student exhibits a thorough ability to think critically and systematically about values (= score of 90% or higher).
2. **Adequate:** The student displays an adequate ability to think critically and systematically about values (=score of 75% -89%).
3. **Inadequate:** The student's critical and systematic thinking about values is inadequate (=score of 60-74%).
4. **Failure:** The student is NOT able to think systematically and critically about values (=score below 60%).

**Findings:** The application of the rubric produced results indicating that roughly 75% of the students are adequate or outstanding with regard to this learning outcome. There seemed to be very little difference from the first to the second assignment for this learning outcome.

**Conclusion:** While we think that a 75% adequacy rate is acceptable, we also think that more students should be achieving adequacy for this outcome--and that more emphasis should be placed on developing assignments that can help students achieve this goal.

## G.E. Assessment

### Scores – Section 1

Last Name	Score on Egoism QUIZ	score on rubric	Score on Egoism section of MIDTERM	score on rubric
Bai--	9	1	7	2
Ber--	6.5	3	3	4
Bla--	9.5	1	4	4
Gro--	10	1	9	1
Jon--	10	1	7	2
Law--	10	1	8	2
Sal--	6.5	3	7	2
San--	7	2	5	4
Tay--	10	1	10	1
Wal--	9	1	9	1
Was--	9.5	1	8	2
Wat--	7.5	2	7	2

AVERAGE 8.71 7.00  
 # adequate 10 9

### Scores –Section 2

Last Name	Score on Egoism QUIZ	score on rubric	Score on Egoism section of MIDTERM	score on rubric
Als--	6.5	3	5	4
Bou--	8.5	2	9	1
Bro--	9.5	1	10	1
Gle--	9.5	1	8	2
Khe--	9.5	1	9	1
Kop--	10	1	9	1
Mar--	6.5	3	6	3
Par--	9.5	1	10	1
San--	8.5	2	5	4
Sch--	6.5	3	9	1
She--	7.5	2	8	2
Xio--	7	2	7	2

AVERAGE 8.25 7.92  
 # adequate 9 9

## **V. Results**

Details noted above under our specific assessment projects.

General Results: the department is doing an adequate job of teaching argumentative skills and specific content. We need to work better at clarifying expectations for argumentative papers and we need to raise the bar in terms of content.

## **VI. Closing the Loop**

Dr. Fiala and Dr. Biondo will continue to cultivate collegial relations between faculty in the department and across campus through interdisciplinary efforts in the Ethics Center, NEH Project, and Middle East Studies. Our primary goals are to increase inclusion, maintain a superb level of student access, and to foster critical thinking for professional success and the responsibilities of democratic citizenship. To these ends our research, teaching, and service overlap to reinforce the empowerment of Fresno State students and local community leaders.

Our assessment efforts have measured a continued deficiency in the rigor of student written argumentation. Clear and effective professional communication can benefit our students substantially in their future careers, yet this area has received less emphasis in recent years because of the rapid growth of digital technologies combined with the inefficiencies of instructor patience and perseverance required in the face of an ongoing budgetary concerns.

To remedy this underweighting in our course delivery and to enhance student academic performance, Dr. Fiala and Dr. Biondo will design a philosophical argumentation and thesis writing course content module that can be made available to our department faculty for use in all Philosophy courses.

In addition to the new thesis writing course module to be piloted in Fall 2011, department faculty will be encouraged to assign one “difficult” non-fiction book in philosophy classes. Frequent and intensive practice in reading improves philosophical argumentation beyond course content and writing workshops.