I. Mission Statement, Student Learning Goals and Student Learning Objectives

1. Philosophy Department Mission Statement. Last year we formulated a new mission statement for the Westmont philosophy department/program. It will replace our old mission statement, which is currently in the college catalog.

   a. From the current college catalog: “The Westmont philosophy program is designed to foster the ability to think critically and analytically, communicate clearly and logically, interact with the philosophic tradition, and explore the relationship between philosophy and the Christian faith.”

   b. New department mission statement: “The mission of the Westmont College philosophy department is to provide an education in philosophy from a Christian standpoint that will enable both philosophy students and philosophy professors to cultivate knowledge, skills, and values conducive to their development as Christian philosophers. The department serves students who are not philosophy majors by giving them a philosophical introduction to the Christian liberal arts (in our Philosophical Perspectives GE Common Context courses) and by facilitating their ability to reason abstractly (in our GE Common Inquiries Reasoning Abstractly courses). Philosophy majors also receive a comprehensive philosophical education from a Christian point of view that is designed to prepare them for life-long Christian philosophical reflection as either a professional or lay philosopher. The department seeks to serve philosophy faculty by encouraging and supporting their on-going philosophical research and teaching.”
2. Student Learning Goals.

a. Philosophy Major General Student Learning Goals. In addition to developing a new mission statement for our major program, we formulated three new general student learning goals for our department (to supplement the three GE goals that we had adopted earlier – see section 2c below). We also came up with specific learning objectives for each of these goals. The general goals have to do with knowledge, skills, and virtues:

   i. Knowledge: Students will acquire knowledge about enduring philosophical questions, major philosophers of the past and present, fundamental philosophical concepts, competing philosophical theories, and standard philosophical arguments. Students will also gain understanding of the contributions of Christian philosophers to historical and contemporary philosophical dialogue.

   ii. Skills: Students will learn how to recognize, construct, understand, and evaluate arguments, to analyze concepts, and to formulate and assess the frameworks of alternative worldviews. Students will also be able to read philosophical material with understanding and to write clear argumentative essays.

   iii. Virtues: Students will value the pursuit of wisdom and will exhibit the virtues of charity, humility, carefulness, creativity, and fair-mindedness in their intellectual activity. They will demonstrate an appropriate balance between confident conviction and critical questioning. They will value both the clarity and precision and the significance and profundity of the best philosophical contributions.

b. Specific Learning Objectives Under Each General Goal:

   i. Knowledge

      1. Students will be able to state an adequate number of main questions in the three main areas of philosophy (epistemology, metaphysics, and axiology) and students will be able to summarize the basic views of an adequate number of major philosophers in all four periods of the history of philosophy (ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary).

      2. Students will be able to list and characterize an adequate number of main philosophical concepts, theories, and arguments that are discussed in the three major areas of philosophy.
3. Students will be able to provide examples of an adequate number of contributions of Christian philosophers to historical and contemporary philosophical dialogue.

ii. Skills

1. Students will be able to distinguish arguments from assertions, explanations, reports, and the like.

2. Students will be able to identify the premises and conclusions of arguments, to recognize a variety of fallacies, and to assess arguments for validity, soundness, strength, and cogency.

3. Students will be able to weigh and explain the significance of historically prominent arguments for and against such views as rationalism, empiricism, theism, naturalism, utilitarianism, egoism, etc.

4. Students will be able to write clear argumentative essays.

iii. Virtues

1. In papers, exams, or oral presentations, students will exhibit a commitment to the pursuit of wisdom.

2. In papers, exams, or oral presentations, students will exhibit the virtues of charity, humility, carefulness, creativity, and fair-mindedness in their intellectual lives to an appropriate degree.

   a. Charity: interpret ideas, positions and arguments charitably (e.g., so as to avoid needless attribution of invalidity, falsehood, or unreasonableness);

   b. Humility: show an awareness, and proper appreciation, of their own intellectual limitations (e.g., by being ready to admit that they may have misunderstood something, been ignorant of some relevant fact, committed some error in reasoning and so on); will not over-value their own abilities or contributions or under-value those of others;

   c. Carefulness: read, write and think with due attention to content, context and proper method; will avoid rushing to snap judgments, superficial interpretations or shoddy work;
d. **Creativity:** (relative to what they have read or been taught) think about philosophical matters in new and fruitful ways, or apply them in new and fruitful ways; will not be unable or afraid to do so;

e. **Fair-mindedness:** will consider and appropriately weigh the strengths and weaknesses of the various ideas they encounter, even those from philosophers or viewpoints with which they disagree. They will not hold philosophers or viewpoints with which they disagree to standards arbitrarily different from those to which they hold philosophers or viewpoints with which they agree.

3. In papers, exams, or oral presentations, students will, to an appropriate degree, demonstrate an appropriate balance between confident conviction and critical questioning;

   a. Students will take a position on the relevant issue and will be able to say why they have taken that position and will look for relevant countervailing reasons and will show a readiness to respond appropriately to countervailing reasons (e.g., by answering those reasons or modifying their own position accordingly).

4. In papers, exams, or oral presentations, students will value both the clarity and precision and the significance and profundity of the best philosophical contributions.

   a. Students will engage with philosophical contributions noted for their clarity and precision and will not dismiss or belittle philosophical contributions simply because they are expressed in modes characteristic of clarity and precision (e.g., by way of various analytical, logical or other formal techniques or vocabulary);

   b. Students will engage with philosophical contributions noted for their significance and profundity and will not dismiss or belittle philosophical contributions simply because they concern matters of significance and profundity (e.g., questions of being, meaning, value or humanity generally).
c. **General Education Student Learning Goals.** In our departmental program review assessment plan, dated January 28th, 2004, we adopted three student learning goals for the courses we teach that satisfy GE requirements. The first of these goals involves our Philosophical Perspectives (PHI-006) course, which students can take to fulfill their Philosophical Reflections Common Context GE requirement. The second goal involves the courses we teach by means of which students may satisfy their Reasoning Abstractly Common Inquiries GE requirement. The third goal involves our philosophy major senior seminar, which all of our majors are now required to take in their last spring semester at Westmont (we offered this course for the first time last spring). The first two of these goals were discussed at length throughout the 2007-2008 academic year by two different committees. The first committee consisted of the instructors who teach courses that satisfy the Philosophical Reflections requirement and the second committee consisted of instructors who teach courses that satisfy the Reasoning Abstractly requirement. As a result of the work of these two committees, our first two GE goals have been rephrased and the specific student learning objectives under each of these two goals have been reformulated. Also, now that we have offered our Senior Seminar course for the first time, the three of us who will take turns teaching that course have begun to work more thoroughly on our third GE goal and the student learning objectives associated with it.

i. **GE Goal 1:** Students who take a course in the “Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value” Common Context GE area will (at the end of the course) be able to state in basic terms the contribution of philosophical reflection to their Christian liberal arts education.

1. **Student learning objective 1.1:** (Philosophy) Students will be able to recognize and articulate foundational questions of philosophy – especially foundational questions of particular interest to Christians – though the emphasis among knowing, being, and value will vary by course.

2. **Student learning objective 1.2:** (Liberal Arts) Students will be able to articulate some of the main components of a Christian liberal arts education and the interrelation of philosophy and other areas of academic study in the liberal arts, both in terms of **content** and the development and application of **transferable skills**.

3. **Student learning objective 1.3:** (Worldview) Students will be able to articulate the relationship between philosophical commitments/academic life and their beliefs, feelings, commitments, and practices as components of an integral life, considered as a whole.
ii. **GE Goal 2**: Students who take a course to satisfy the “Reasoning Abstractly” GE requirement (including PHI-12, PHI-101, PHI-102, and RS-103) will demonstrate increased facility with abstract philosophical reasoning.

1. **Student learning objective 2.1**: (Abstract Reasoning Recognition) Students can identify instances of abstract deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving) and can distinguish premises from conclusions (or their analogues).

2. **Student learning objective 2.2**: (Abstract Reasoning Construction) Students can construct an instance of valid deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving).

3. **Student learning objective 2.3**: (Abstract Reasoning Evaluation) Students can distinguish valid forms of deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving) from invalid and/or fallacious forms of reasoning.

d. **GE Goal 3**: Philosophy majors who take the new Senior Seminar course required for all philosophy majors will demonstrate (a) conformity with the formal standards for a good philosophical essay and (b) ability to integrate philosophical learning with Christian faith and anticipated post-graduation living.

i. We have not yet formulated specific learning objectives for this GE goal.

**II. Data and Interpretation**

1. **Specific Learning Objectives.** We have not yet collected data on the new Philosophy Major Student Learning Goals and Specific Learning Objectives that are listed above in I 2 a & b (since we just finished formulating these goals last spring). Our program review conversations this fall will focus on assessment tools and rubrics related to some of these goals and objectives. We did collect data resulting from our use of assessments in our GE courses (PHI 6, RS 103, PHI 12, PHI 102, and PHI 195). The data for the 2008 fall semester are from Taylor’s PHI 6 and RS 103 courses. The data for the 2009 spring semester are from sections of PHI 6 taught by Nelson, Taylor, and Vander Laan and from
PHI 12 (taught by Vander Laan) and PHI 102 (taught by Taylor). Last semester (Spring 2009) was the first semester in which we collected data that resulted from assessments we used in our Senior Seminar course (PHI 195, taught by Taylor). We have data in hard copy form in our offices and also data in electronic form on our laptops. We need to work on storing all the hard copy data in the same place and storing all the data in electronic form in the same place. For the latter, our plan is to use a shared Google docs Excel file. Since we spent so much time last year developing our new mission statement, general philosophy major program student learning goals, and specific student learning objectives, we have not had any significant conversations about the data we collected last year. So we have not yet engaged in a collective interpretation of these data. We will put a discussion of these data on our agenda for program review conversations this fall semester. Below is a summary list of the goals for which we employed assessments last year and an indication by semester of which courses, taught by which professors, include these assessments. Summaries of the evaluation instruments, data collected, and individual interpretation of the data can be found in the appendices that accompany this report.

a. **GE Student Learning Goal 1 and PHI-006**

i. **Fall 2008.** Taylor administered an assessment in his PHI 6 course to measure the degree of student learning relative to the first student learning objective under our first GE student learning goal. See Appendix A for a summary of the assessment method, data collected, and interpretation of data.

ii. **Spring 2009.** Nelson, Taylor, and Vander Laan each administered assessments in their PHI 6 courses last spring to measure the degree of student learning relative to our first GE student learning goal: “Students who take a course in the “Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value” Common Context GE area will (at the end of the course) be able to state in basic terms the contribution of philosophical reflection to their Christian liberal arts education.” Vander Laan focused on this general goal while Nelson and Taylor honed in more specifically on one of the specific learning objectives under this goal: “Students will be able to recognize and articulate foundational questions of philosophy – especially foundational questions of particular interest to Christians – though the emphasis among knowing, being, and value will vary by course.” (Vander Laan was on sabbatical while this specific learning objective was being formulated and somehow there was a breakdown in communication about its having been adopted). See Appendices B, C, & D for summaries of the assessment methods, data collected, and interpretation of data.

iii. **GE Student Learning Goal 2 and RS 103, PHI 12, and PHI 102**
1. **Fall 2008.** Taylor assessed student learning (relative to the second specific learning objective under our second GE Student Learning goal) in RS 103. See Appendix E for a summary of the assessment method, data collected, and interpretation of data.

2. **Spring 2009.** Vander Laan assessed student learning relative to this goal in PHI 12 and Taylor assessed student learning relative to this goal in PHI 102. See Appendices F and G for details involving assessment method, data collected, and interpretation of data.

iv. **GE Student Learning Goal 3 and PHI 195**

1. **Spring 2009.** Taylor assessed student learning relative to our third GE goal in PHI 195: Senior Seminar. However, Taylor has yet to summarize the results of that assessment. This will be an agenda item for our department conversations.

2. **Interpretation of the Results.**

   a. As reported in our 2008 annual report, our conversations about the results of our fall 2007 assessment methods (and those of previous years) led us to come to at least the following general conclusions: (a) We need to provide more specific definitions of the key terms in our student learning goals; (b) we need to formulate at least three more specific, measurable student learning objectives under each of our general student goals; (c) we need to agree on a rubric that we can all use in the evaluation of our students’ responses to the administration of our assessment tools (even if we choose to use different specific assessment methods that are suited to our particular courses and course aims); and (d) we need to provide our students with additional resources to help prepare them for success in their performance in these assessment activities. Generally speaking, we learned that our students need clearer (more specific and precise) definitions, objectives, evaluation criteria, and guidelines.

   b. In the past year we have accomplished goals (a), (b), and (d) just stated (in 2a) above. Our department meetings devoted to the discussion of program review and assessment focused on (a) and (b) with respect to our general student learning goals and objectives (our GE student learning goals and objectives were already formulated and defined). We have also individually addressed concern (d) by adopting additional resources for at least our GE courses (some of us have begun using Cornelius Plantinga’s *Engaging God’s World* in PHI 6 and I have begun using Anthony Weston’s *A Rulebook for Arguments* in my Reasoning Abstractly and Senior Seminar courses. I have also been using Moreland and Craig’s *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* for PHI 6 and I have been working on a resource for that course that will supplement the texts I am using in such a way as to make more explicit the ways in which the course is a philosophical introduction to a
Christian liberal arts education. As for (c), we have met with other instructors of courses satisfying the Philosophical Reflections GE requirement and the Reasoning Abstractly GE requirement (at Ray Rosentrater’s initiation) to discuss grading rubrics. We have yet to discuss rubrics for our general student learning goals and objectives (those that apply to our major program more generally rather than just to our GE courses).
## GE Student Learning Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do the Learning Goals mean?</th>
<th>Contribution of Philosophy to the Christian Lib. Arts</th>
<th>Abstract Philosophical Reasoning Skills</th>
<th>Senior Seminar: Writing and Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>See section I 2 c i above.</td>
<td>See section I 2 c ii above.</td>
<td>1. Can write good philosophical essay.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Can integrate philosophy with faith &amp; life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Where are the Learning Outcomes met?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How are they assessed?</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
<th>Link to the learning standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay exams</td>
<td>At least 80% excellent or very good</td>
<td>Christ. Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class essays</td>
<td>At least 80% excellent or very good</td>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic exams</td>
<td></td>
<td>Christ. Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arg. analysis exs.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical essays</td>
<td></td>
<td>Written Commun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class discussions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Benchmark

- At least 80% excellent or very good
- To be determined

## Link to the learning standards

- Christ. Orientation
- Critical Thinking
- Written Commun.
III. Using the Results and Next Steps

Up until last year, we spent virtually all of our program review and assessment efforts focusing on our first two GE goals. We have now developed assessment tools to evaluate student learning in our GE courses relative to one of the objective under each of these two goals and we have collected a fair amount of data as a result. Here are some remaining things we need to do next with respect to our GE goals:

- Organize our raw data and data summaries in such a way as to keep the physical copies in one place and the electronic files in one place.
- Ensure that our assessment tools are measuring the same thing (student achievement of the same learning objective interpreted in the same way) even if they involve different methods of measurement.
- Make our evaluation rubrics more uniform and more specific.
- Have more conversations about what our past results mean about the degree and quality of our students’ learning and what these interpretations suggest about possible ways we could revise our courses to facilitate greater student learning.
- Combine and summarize our results in these GE courses to date so that we might have a better sense of how we are doing collectively in addition to how we are doing individually.
- Share a few representative graded assignments with each other and evaluate each others’ students’ work relative to our rubrics to see how similar our judgments are.
- Summarize and discuss the assessment results from Taylor’s spring 2009 Senior Seminar (PHI 195) course and decide what kinds of revisions may need to be incorporated into the course when Vander Laan teaches it this coming spring.

Now that we have shifted our emphasis to the non-GE parts of our major program, we need to do the following:

- Identify courses in which to focus on some of the specific student learning objectives we have formulated under our three general student learning goals.
- Develop assessment tools to employ in measuring student learning relative to these objectives.
- Formulate rubrics to use in communicating to students what we are looking for in these assignments and in evaluating student submissions of these assignments.
- Construct a chart like the one in section I above that summarizes outcomes (objectives), courses, assessment tools, benchmarks, and
links to learning standards for our general student learning goals (like the chart we have constructed for our GE goals).

- Communicate our general goals and objectives to our students by putting them in the relevant course syllabi.

- Implement the assessment tools we have developed, evaluate them with the rubrics we have designed, summarize the data that results from our use of these rubrics, discuss what this data means, decide on benchmarks that we will implement in future assessments, and decide what actions we will take in light of this interpreted data.

- Put our new departmental mission statement on our webpage and in our major course syllabi.

- Construct a multi-year assessment plan.

IV. Data For Program Review

- We are still gathering this data. We will submit it when are have acquired all of it.

V. Time-line for completion of the 6 year report

We have a lot to do here. We will submit a Multi-Year Assessment Plan later when we have had a chance to formulate one. We have two years before we need to submit our 6-year Program Review Report on September 15th, 2011. We also need to choose someone to be our principal Program Review Report preparer and submit a proposal for a course release for that person (if they are still available).

In our report last year (2008) I said that among the things we need to accomplish are (a) a new mission statement for our department (this has now been done), (b) Four to six philosophy-major-specific student goals and carefully formulated specific student learning objectives for each of these goals (we now have three such goals with three to four objectives for each of them), (c) a plan for the assessment of student progress toward the achievement of these goals (we still need to come up with this plan), (d) rubrics to use in the evaluation of student performance on the assessment instruments we will employ to measure student progress toward these goals (still needed), (e) the construction of the assessment methods themselves for each student learning objective (still needed), (f) a plan to discuss the results of each administration of these assessment tools with a view to ongoing revision to our courses and program in light of our findings (still needed), (g) the gathering of basic statistical information about our program (still needed), (h) an account of our use of both financial and other institutional resources for the education of our students (still needed), and (i) our long-term vision and goals for our department, program, and major (still needed). We still have clearly got a lot to do!

Given all of these agenda items and the relatively short amount of time we have until our six-year review is due, we need to come up with a timeline for the accomplishment of these things as soon as possible. We also need to be diligent about collecting data in our major courses about student learning relative to our newly-formulated specific student learning
objectives. And we need to make sure we do this to some extent every one of the four semesters between now and September 15, 2011.
Relevant Student Learning Objective

1. Students will be able to (a) articulate and (b) think critically about foundational questions of philosophy - especially foundational questions of particular interest to Christians - though the emphasis among knowing, being, and value will vary by course.

Background

In the course syllabus I assigned the students a final project with the following instructions:

Your final project (due at 5 pm on Friday, December 12th, which is the last day of classes) should provide a well-written, well-organized, and well-reasoned reply to the following question:

"What is the role of philosophy in a Christian liberal arts education with respect to (a) the integration of theology and the other academic disciplines for the purpose of constructing a Christian worldview and (b) preparation for prime citizenship in the Kingdom of God?"

In writing this essay you should include the following:

1. Articulation of and critical thinking about the foundational questions of philosophy, especially foundational questions of particular interest to Christians;

2. Articulation of the main components of a Christian liberal arts education and the interrelation of philosophy and other areas of academic study in the liberal arts, both in terms of content and the development and application of transferable skills; and

3. Articulation of the relationship between philosophical commitments/academic life and your beliefs, feelings, commitments, and practices as components of an integral life, considered as a whole.

You should make use of both of the texts (Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview and Engaging God's World) in writing your essay. You should also consult the resources posted on our Eureka site entitled "Liberal Arts Traditions and Christian Higher Education."

Your paper should be word-processed and should range between 2000 and 2500 words.

Because of the disruption caused by the fire, I decided to make this an optional extra credit assignment. Out the 42 students enrolled in the class, 19 students completed the assignment (45% of the class).

Results

Articulating the foundational questions of philosophy:
Excellent (A): All 10 53%
Good (B): Most 7 37%
Acceptable (C): Some 2 10%
Poor (D): Few 0 0%
Unacceptable (F): None 0 0%

Critical thinking about foundational questions of philosophy

Excellent (A): Very well 4 21%
Good (B): Well 7 37%
Acceptable (C): Passably well 8 42%
Poor (D): Poorly 0 0%
Unacceptable (F): Badly/Not at all 0 0%

Commentary

I am pleased that more than half of the students who completed this assignment got an “A” on the articulation of the foundational questions of philosophy. Moreover, a full 90% got either an “A” or a “B” on this part of the assignment. However, I am disappointed that only 21% got an “A” on the critical thinking component of the assignment (and only 56% got either an “A” or a “B” on this part). Interestingly, these results are the reverse of the outcome of the same assignment last (spring 2008) semester in Honors Philosophical Perspectives. In my report on that semester’s assessment of the GE goals for this course, I commented on how it was interesting that only 8 students got an “A” on articulation (42%) and 14 got an “A” on critical thinking (74%). The results in the current report are that 53% got an “A” in articulation and only 21% got an “A” in critical thinking (though 37% got a “B” in each of these areas). On the basis of the spring 2008 results, I had decided to work harder at helping students to articulate foundational philosophical questions. My efforts along these lines appear to have succeeded. However, it now seems that I will also need to work harder to help students think critically about foundational philosophical questions (and perhaps also to make it clearer in the assignment how I want them to do this). Perhaps the main reason the spring 2008 students did so much better in critical thinking than the fall 2008 students is because the former was an honors course. I also think that I need to have a pre-test similar to the assignment that I am currently reporting on (this was a goal of mine after I examined the spring results, but I neglected to implement this in the fall).
Appendix B

Report on Philosophical Reflections GE Assessment Results
PHI-006-2 “Philosophical Perspectives”
Spring Semester, 2009
Mark T. Nelson

Relevant Student Learning Objective

1. Students will be able to (a) **articulate**, and (b) **think critically about** foundational questions of philosophy - especially foundational questions of particular interest to Christians - though the emphasis among knowing, being, and value will vary by course.

Background

The grade for this course had four components: daily quizzes (25%), writing assignment # 1 (25%), writing assignment # 2 (25%) and final exam (25%).

Writing Assignment # 2 was as follows:

Read the essay, “Famine, Affluence and Morality” by Peter Singer (Pojman, ed., pp. 631-638) and write a magnificent 1500 word essay responding to the following questions:

1. What is Singer’s main conclusion? What is his argument for that conclusion? (Break it down into steps, if possible.)

2. Consider the following criticisms:
   a. “Singer wrote his paper in 1972. It is now over thirty years old and his argument no longer applies.”
   b. “Singer is unrealistic about human nature: almost nobody would be motivated to follow his suggestions.”
   c. “What I do with my money is my business. If I want to give it away to help the needy, that’s above and beyond the call of duty. If I don’t, I’m not doing anything wrong.”
   d. “Singer just wants us to give things to needy people, but that’s ineffective. As the old proverb says, Give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he’ll eat for life!”

How damaging are these criticisms to Singer’s argument? Can he make an adequate reply?

Evaluation

I graded each student essay according to a template (see attached) for both substantive and formal criteria. For each of the criteria, students were given a mark of:

Most of the template criteria bear, in one way or another, on the Student Learning Objectives: criteria 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 12 and 13 primarily concerned objective (a) “articulating foundational questions”, while criteria 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15 and 16 primarily concerned objective (b) “thinking critically about foundational questions”. (Obviously, there is no clean division between the ability to articulate a philosophical question and the ability to think critically about it, but I have grouped points together according to which objective is in my opinion primary.)

Results

(a) “articulating the foundational questions of philosophy”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“+” = excellent</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“√+” = good</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“√” = OK</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“√−” = needs work</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“-” = poor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“X” = failure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) “thinking critically about the foundational questions of philosophy”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>25.5</td>
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<td>“√+” = good</td>
<td>109</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“√” = OK</td>
<td>121.5</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“√−” = needs work</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“-” = poor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“X” = failure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commentary

- This is the first year I have gathered assessment data, so I am unable to make significant comparative judgments across years.
- That said, 89.3% and 89.2% were judged as “OK” or better on objectives (a) and (b) respectively.
- That is, almost 90% of the class did at least moderately well in respect of these learning objectives on this assignment. This strikes me as satisfactory, though it leaves room for improvement, though I shall have to compare these data with those from colleagues in other courses.
Appendix C

Report on Philosophical Reflections GE Assessment Results
Philosophical Perspectives
Spring 2009
Jim Taylor

Relevant Student Learning Objectives

1. Students will be able to (a) articulate and (b) think critically about foundational questions of philosophy - especially foundational questions of particular interest to Christians - though the emphasis among knowing, being, and value will vary by course.

2. Students will be able to articulate some of the main components of a Christian liberal arts education and the interrelation of philosophy and other areas of academic study in the liberal arts, both in terms of content and the development and application of transferable skills.

Background

In the course syllabus I assigned the students a final project with the following instructions:

Your final project (due at 5 pm on Friday, May 1st, which is the last day of classes) should provide a well-written, well-organized, and well-reasoned reply to the following question:

"What is the role of philosophy in a Christian liberal arts education with respect to (a) the integration of theology and the other academic disciplines for the purpose of constructing a Christian worldview and (b) preparation for prime citizenship in the Kingdom of God?"

In writing this essay you should include the following:

1. Articulation of and critical thinking about the foundational questions of philosophy, especially foundational questions of particular interest to Christians;

2. Articulation of the main components of a Christian liberal arts education and the interrelation of philosophy and other areas of academic study in the liberal arts, both in terms of content and the development and application of transferable skills; and

3. Articulation of the relationship between philosophical commitments/academic life and your beliefs, feelings, commitments, and practices as components of an integral life, considered as a whole.

You should make use of both of the texts (Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview and Engaging God's World) in writing your essay. You should also consult the resources posted on our Eureka site entitled "Liberal Arts Traditions and Christian Higher Education."

Your paper should be word-processed and should total around 1250 words.

Results (44 students did the assignment.)

Articulating & thinking critically about the foundational questions of philosophy:
Articulation of the relationship between philosophy and the Christian liberal arts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent (A): Very well</th>
<th>6  14%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good (B): Well</td>
<td>21  48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable (C): Passably well</td>
<td>17  38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor (D): Poorly</td>
<td>0    0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unacceptable (F): Badly/Not at all</td>
<td>0  0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commentary

This semester I decided to evaluate students on their achievement of the second student learning objective in addition to the first. In the fall semester of 2008, my focus was exclusively on the first learning objective. In the fall semester I also divided that learning objective into two parts, one having to do with the articulation of the foundational questions of philosophy and the other concerning critical thinking about them. When the fall 2008 results of those two parts of the first learning objective are averaged, the totals are 37% excellent, 37% good, and 26% acceptable. When these averaged results are compared to the corresponding spring 2009 results for the first objective (36% excellent, 50% good, and 14% acceptable), one can see that roughly the same number of students are at the excellent level but that there has been a 13% increase in the percentage of students doing good work on this objective (and a corresponding decrease in the percentage of students doing only acceptable work on this objective). So the student performance on this assignment relative to this objective has improved. One reason for this may be that I did the following in the spring 2009 class which I didn’t do (or didn’t do as well) in the fall 2008 class: (a) provided earlier, clearer, and more frequent discussions of the nature of philosophical questions and critical thinking about them and (b) provided clearer instructions and guidance on the assignment itself. Another possible part of the explanation for the increase in scores overall is that in the fall semester only 19 out of 42 students did this assignment, and they did it as extra credit. So there were fewer students represented and the students represented were only those who did the assignment in order to try to improve their course grade.

The spring 2009 results on the second student learning objective are clearly not as good (only 14% excellent, 48% good, and 38% acceptable). Though there are no previous semester’s results for this learning objective (since this is the first semester I have evaluated this assignment relative to this objective) these results will provide a baseline for comparison in future semesters. As I think about what might explain these lower scores, it seems clear that there is simply not enough material in the reading and lectures to enable students to articulate well the contribution of philosophy to the Christian liberal
arts. I am currently working on a resource to supplement the textbooks that will address this deficiency. I look forward to seeing what the results are on this assignment for this objective in future semesters when students have had a chance to employ this resource.
Appendix D

Report on Philosophical Reflections GE Assessment Results
Philosophical Perspectives (Honors)
Spring 2009
David Vander Laan

Relevant Student Learning Objective

“Students will be able to articulate the role of philosophy in their Christian liberal arts education and in their construction of a Christian worldview.”

Background

One question on the final exam was based on lecture, discussion, and a reading from Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.’s Engaging God’s World. For example:

- What does the notion of vocation have to do with the meaning of life?
- What does Cornelius Plantinga mean by saying each of us has a kingdom?
- How does Plantinga’s view of vocation relate to the project of a liberal arts college?

These questions gave students opportunity to demonstrate their ability to articulate their knowledge of the interrelationships between philosophical questions (particularly about vocation and the meaning of life) and the Christian liberal arts. Because of the oral format, not every student answered the same question, and due to time constraints, not every student answered a question on this theme.

Results

This past semester (spring 2009), nearly all students who were asked one of the above questions scored 8 (out of 10) or better; in fact, each of these students scored 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Proficiency (9-10)</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some Proficiency (7-8)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate Proficiency (0-6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commentary

Eight out of twelve students in the class were asked one of the questions based on the Plantinga reading. These students’ scores were higher than the corresponding
scores in most previous semesters. Given that the class was an honors section, this result is not surprising.

The consistency of the scores gives me some confidence that the other members of the class also would have been able to articulate the role of philosophy in worldview formation and in Christian liberal arts education. Still, since most of my future classes will have more students and more variety in ability levels, I plan to reorder the questions on the exam so that more students have an opportunity to answer a question on these themes. That will improve the quality of the data collected, and it will give me an opportunity to alert students to the fact that the objective above is an important course goal.
Appendix E

Report on Reasoning Abstractly GE Assessment Results
Christian Apologetics (RS 103)
Fall 2008
Jim Taylor

Relevant Student Learning Objective

2. Students can construct an instance of valid deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving).

Background

In the course syllabus, I assigned the students the following final project due on the last day of classes:

You are to write a 1500-word argumentative essay that has the following features:

1. A thorough reconstruction in standard argument form (a list of numbered propositions starting with the premises and ending with the conclusion) of a critic’s argument against a core Christian claim or doctrine, together with an explanation of the argument; and
2. A defense of this Christian claim or doctrine by means of a counterargument providing reasons to doubt or deny a premise of the critics’ argument (in standard prose form rather than standard argument form).

Your reconstruction and counterargument must be in your own words as much as possible (i.e., don't just employ my (or someone else’s) formulation of the arguments).

I provided the students with a list of 26 critics’ objections from which they were to choose one for this assignment. Because of the disruption caused by the fire, I made this an optional extra credit assignment. Out of the 26 students in the course, seven students completed this assignment.

I used the following rubric (approved by the GE Reasoning Abstractly sub-committee) in evaluating these assignments:

High proficiency (4): Can state a conclusion and formulate premises that clearly entail it
Proficiency (3): Can state a conclusion and formulate premises for it that entail it
Some proficiency (2): Can state a conclusion and formulate a premise for it
No/limited proficiency (1): Cannot construct a valid deductive argument
Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High proficiency (4)</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>43%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency (3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some proficiency (2)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No/limited proficiency (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commentary

Though only seven of the 26 students in this course completed this optional extra credit assignment, these students are a representative sample of all the students in the class (based on their final grades). I am glad that over half (57%) of the students demonstrated either proficiency or high proficiency in deductive argument construction on this assignment. However, this percentage is not sufficiently high. My benchmark for this type of assessment is that at least 80% of the students who complete the assignment show at least proficiency in abstract reasoning construction. I will need to work harder in the future to help more of the students succeed on this assignment at the desired level. I have started using a book (*A Handbook for Arguments*) to help students prepare for this assignment. But I have left it too much up to the students to learn about argument construction by reading this book on their own (and by modeling it in my book and in class). I need to be more deliberate and explicit about *explaining* argument construction in class rather than merely *modeling* argument construction.
Appendix F

Report on Reasoning Abstractly GE Assessment Results
Critical Reasoning and Logic (PHI-012-1)
Spring 2009
David Vander Laan

Relevant Student Learning Objectives

2. Students can construct an instance of valid deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving).

3. Students can distinguish valid forms of deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving) from invalid and/or fallacious forms of reasoning.

Background

The final exam for the course consisted primarily of exercises in constructing proofs in first order logic and in distinguishing fallacious forms or reasoning from acceptable ones. The final exam was comprehensive and required students to demonstrate facility with all the skills that had been practiced during the semester, sometimes without the contextual clues that suggest a method when the techniques were first introduced.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Proficiency (80-100%)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Proficiency (65-79%)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate Proficiency (0-64%)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commentary

My benchmark for the objectives above is that *sixty percent of the tested students score 80% or better on the final exam*. This past semester only forty two percent of students (13 out of 31) scored 80% or better on the final. This is pretty consistent with scores dating back to 2005. In contrast, in 2004 seventy five percent of the students scored 80% or better on the final. Students have not been meeting this benchmark consistently. It looks as if class size and composition makes a significant difference; one student population can do considerably better than another. Another factor is presumably
the amount of practice students get with formal logic in the later parts of the semester (when our focus is on informal reasoning) and with argument construction in the earlier parts of the semester. I plan to reorganize my syllabus to allow more time for exercises in writing well-crafted arguments (an important step in both argument construction and evaluation). I also plan to continue discussing with the department our goals for the logic curriculum and whether they would be better served by a different balance of formal and informal material, or by two courses rather than one.
Appendix G

Report on Reasoning Abstractly GE Assessment Results
Modern & Contemporary Philosophy (PHI 102)
Spring 2009
Jim Taylor

Relevant Student Learning Objective

2. Students can construct an instance of valid deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving).

Background

In the course syllabus, I assigned the students the following final project due on the last day of classes:

“Your 1250-word term paper (due at 5 pm on Thursday, April 24th, which is the last day of classes) should provide a well-written, well-organized, and well-reasoned analysis and evaluation of an argument or alternative abstract pattern of reasoning employed by a modern or contemporary philosopher. In the analysis section, you should state the premises and conclusion of the argument (or the general abstract pattern of the reasoning). In doing so, you may have to make implicit premises or assumptions explicit. In the evaluation section you should discuss whether the premises of the argument (or assumptions in the pattern of reasoning) are plausible (rationally believable in virtue of being likely to be true).”

All 22 students in the course completed this assignment.

I used the following rubric (approved by the GE Reasoning Abstractly sub-committee) in evaluating these assignments:

High proficiency (4): Can state a conclusion and formulate premises that clearly entail it
Proficiency (3): Can state a conclusion and formulate premises for it that entail it
Some proficiency (2): Can state a conclusion and formulate a premise for it
No/limited proficiency (1): Cannot construct a valid deductive argument

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High proficiency (4)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency (3)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some proficiency (2)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No/Limited proficiency (1)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commentary
Whereas 57% of the students in the fall 2008 RS 103 course were proficient or highly proficient on the abstract reasoning assignment I assigned to them, 64% of the students in this Modern & Contemporary Philosophy course achieved the same general level on their abstract reasoning assignment. I believe that this improvement is partially due to the fact that I followed through on the goal I stated in the fall 2008 RS 103 assessment report comment section of referring more regularly to the argument rulebook throughout the course. I provided much more explicit, regular, clear, and prolonged instruction with examples on the analysis, construction, and evaluation of abstract reasoning in the Modern & Contemporary Philosophy course. It is also possible that the improvement from fall 2008 to spring 2009 was due to the fact that the students who did this assignment in the fall were all doing it for extra credit (and so this group may have included more students who were generally less proficient in abstract reasoning). I was also pleased that only two students (9% of the class) demonstrated little or no proficiency in the construction of deductive arguments (as compared with 14% in this category the previous semester).