

SUNY Fredonia
Department of Philosophy
Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning
Fall 2011

Goals for Student Learning

- (A) **Evaluate Arguments:** Ability to do the following:
 - (1) Identify and reconstruct arguments.
 - (2) Evaluate arguments, especially philosophical ones.
- (B) **Writing and Reasoning:** Ability to compose well-reasoned, persuasive essays.
- (C) **Knowledge:** Understanding of the following:
 - (1) Historically important philosophical ideas or problems.
 - (2) Historically important philosophers.

Description of Methods

The department's assessment instrument is given to senior majors through the required PHIL 477 Capstone Seminar course. The instrument has three parts: (i) a survey, which measures students' perception of and satisfaction with the teaching-learning and advising processes; (ii) a testing portion that has students identify and evaluate the argument in a philosophical passage they have not previously seen; and (iii) a testing portion that has students explain and evaluate historically important philosophical ideas and problems, and identify the contributions of historically important philosophers. All goals are assessed each year; goal B is assessed on the basis of students' Capstone Seminar essays.

Each testing portion described above directly assesses a specific learning goal. For each goal, the scale of grading is from 1 (excellent) to 5 (poor). Rough descriptors for the other values are "good" for 2, "fair" for 3, and "needs improvement" for 4. The standard of scoring is relative to what is appropriate for a graduating senior in our department. Accuracy and strength of analysis, clarity, and knowledge of subject are the criteria.

The members of the departmental assessment committee review the data, apply the rubrics, and interpret the results. They compile a report, which includes the results of assessment activities and recommended actions that we are taking, and might take, pursuant to our assessment findings. The report is submitted to the department chair, finalized, and forwarded to all full-time department members.

Our indicators of student accomplishments are consistent with the mission and vision statements of SUNY Fredonia and the SUNY system. We aspire to refine the critical thinking, writing, and philosophical understanding of our students.

Time Lines

Students return completed assessment surveys/instruments to the Capstone Seminar instructor late in the Fall semester of each year. The members of the departmental assessment committee then have ample time to review the data. Near the end of the academic year, the assessment committee submits the report to the chair, who might make revisions with assessment committee members. The Chair includes the report with the department's annual report and utilizes it in preparing the assessment items therein. The reports are distributed to faculty for discussion of the ideas and their implementation.

Assignments of Responsibility

The PHIL 477 Capstone Seminar instructor is responsible for administering the assessment instrument to senior majors, collecting the completed instruments, and assessing goal B on the basis of student papers associated with the course. Assessment committee members are responsible for reviewing the instruments, and analyzing and summarizing the data. The department chair is responsible for incorporating the report of the assessment committee into the department's annual report as appropriate. All faculty are responsible for providing feedback on the effectiveness of changes made and the feasibility of suggested changes.

Record Keeping

One member of the departmental assessment committee is the designated record keeper and maintains all of the original completed assessment surveys, which constitute our database. The annual report submitted by the assessment committee to the department chair summarizes the qualitative survey responses and aggregates the quantitative results. This is forwarded by the chair to the Dean as part of the departmental annual report, so that interested administrative units have access to this data.

Processes for Using Assessment Results

Implementation of the rubrics associated with the departmental goals for student learning demonstrate the extent to which students have met the goals. If the results significantly fall short of desired expectations, the assessment committee suggests possible changes. The department as a whole considers the likelihood of the changes resulting in desired outcomes. The student-survey portion of the assessment instrument is also used by the committee to suggest possible changes in the delivery of course content or the curriculum itself. Ongoing informal discussions of new teaching techniques or assignments, and their perceived or real effectiveness, also result in changes to promote student learning.