

Course Level Academic Assessment Reporting Form

Semester/year: Fall 2013

Course alpha(s): PHIL 312 & PHIL 401

Course title(s): Ethical Studies; Existentialism and the Human Condition

Course instructor: Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee

Instructor rank: Professor

Modality of the course (underline one or more): Hybrid

Academic Division: Humanities

Academic Concentration: Philosophy

Student Learning Outcome(s) assessed (provide complete SLO language):

CLO-5: Able to present philosophical ideas concisely in a thesis driven paper.

CLO-6. Able to articulate philosophical ideas orally in either a formal or informal presentation.

Student learning outcome alignment (identify the CLO, DLO, GELO and/or ILO aligned with the SLO being assessed):

Since Philosophy is a one-person concentration with limited course offerings, only one course each is assessed for effective oral and written communication respectively. PHIL 312 is assessed for CLO 6 (oral) and PHIL 401 for CLO 5 (writing). Both are taught and assessed by the same full-time instructor.

In PHIL 312: Ethical Studies, students learned about the fundamentals of various ethical theories and learned to apply theories to pertinent ethical issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, world poverty, death penalty and animal rights, etc. via film response & open discussion and formal presentation. Lastly, students were also required to give a persuasive speech on an ethical issue of their own choice, not covered in class, by incorporating at least one ethical theory to justify their ethical stance.

In PHIL 401: Existentialism and the Human Condition, students learned various existential philosophies and were required to demonstrate their textual comprehension via film response & open discussion, article review & discussion, and indepth book report. All the writing assignments were paired with a list of guided questions and were all thesis driven papers.

PHIL 312's SLOs align with the Philosophy CLO-6 on effective oral communication, which also aligns with DLO-5 and ILO-1.

PHIL 401's SLOs align with the Philosophy CLO-5 on writing, which also aligns with DLO-4 and ILO-1.

Assessment procedures (provide a description of the methods used to conduct the assessment):

The sole philosophy faculty scheduled the assessment of program CLOs on oral communication (CLO-5) and writing (CLO-6) for AY 2013-14 in the Philosophy Assessment Plan. Two courses that were offered in the Fall that fulfilled CLO5 & 6 were assessed: PHIL 312: Ethical Studies for CLO 6: oral communication and PHIL 401: Existentialism and the Human Condition for CLO 5: writing.

For the oral assessment, PHIL 312's final persuasive speech assignment was selected, since this assignment represents the culmination of students' course comprehension as well as their oral communication skill. In addition, in this assignment, students were evaluated individually, as opposed to being evaluated as a group in other assignments such as issue presentation. Students were provided with an assignment specific rubric for their speech in addition to the UHWO Oral Assessment Rubric. There were 18 students enrolled and six students were randomly selected for assessment (every 3rd student on the roster). Since there is only one full-time teaching faculty in Philosophy, it was impossible to get another Philosophy faculty to sit in these presentations in order to do an interpersonal rating.

As for the Writing, there were various writing assignments for PHIL 401 including film response, article review and indepth book report. The final book report assignment was selected for assessment. In this assignment, students were to demonstrate their textual comprehension of the assigned reading on a specific philosopher by offering an evaluative book report. Students were provided with specific instructions and questions as well as a sample paper to help them develop their own thesis. The UHWO Writing Assessment Rubric was also made available to the students. There were 15 submissions for the final book report and five students were randomly selected (every 3rd submission on the roster). The UHWO Written Communication Rubric was used to assess these sample papers. In addition, the instructor also developed a general writing rubric to help students develop their writing skills.

Assessment findings (provide a description of the assessment results found with a table that summarizes the rubric scores assigned to student works):

The oral communication assessment found that from the following six randomly selected students' final oral assignments, students generally were able to follow the instructions given for this specific assignment and organize their persuasive speech accordingly with an exception of one student whose speech had no discernable organization. In Table I, the mean score for Organization is 1.5 which shows that students' organization skill is in between "Progressing" and "Advanced". As for "Language" and "Central Message" dimensions, the same finding holds; the mean score is 1.5 as well. Students seemed to have less of a handle on "Delivery" and "Supporting Material"; the mean scores are 1.3 and 1.2 respectively. The overall mean score for this final assignment is 6.8 out of 10 possible score, which shows that students' oral communication skills in these randomly selected samples were above "Progressing" and edge towards "Advanced". Since PHIL 312 is an upper division course designed for 2nd and 3rd year students, the mean score for the assignment seems to align with the level of the course. Students by and large in their final oral assessment demonstrated their oral communication skills that were in between Progressing and Advanced.

Table 1: The mean score for the final oral communication assignment (n=6)

Assignments Assessed	Oral Communication Rubric Dimensions					Total score
	Organization	Language	Delivery	Supporting Material	Central Message	
Student 1	2	2	2	1	2	9
Student 2	0	1	1	1	1	4
Student 3	2	2	1	1	1	7
Student 4	2	1	1	2	2	8
Student 5	2	2	2	1	2	8
Student 6	1	1	1	1	1	5
Mean Score	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.5	6.8

The written communication assessment found in Table 2 that from the following 5 randomly selected students' final writing assignments, students by and large understood the mechanics of writings with one exception. And since this is a 400 level course, students were generally in their 3rd or 4th year of college; it then can be expected that students have thus far been exposed to various writing assignments prior to taking this WI courses and hence have some mastery over the mechanics of writing. What most students seemed to need to continuously work on was the specifics of philosophical writings, especially the mastery over the use of sources and evidence which has the lowest overall score, 0.8. Philosophical texts are by and large difficult to comprehend, and without comprehending the text clearly, consequently students were less successful in using the sources to support their arguments. Another area for improvement is the "Context of and Purpose for Writing" whose mean score is 1. Once again, since the assigned readings were difficult to comprehend, students in this sample writings were generally unable to grasp the overall context of the writing assignment with one exception. Overall, students' mean score for this final assignment is 5.2, which shows that students in this 400 level course were slightly above "Progressing". Unfortunately, the outcome didn't quite align with the supposed level of this WI course, which should be edging towards "Advanced".

Table 2. The mean scores for the final writing assignment (n=5)

Assignments Assessed	Written Rubric Dimensions					Total Score
	Purpose	Content dev.	Genre	Source	Mechanics	
Student 1	1	1	1	0	2	5
Student 2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student 3	2	2	2	2	1	9
Student 4	1	1	1	1	2	6
Student 5	1	1	1	1	2	6
Mean Score	1	1.2	1.2	0.8	1.4	5.2

Assessment conclusions (provide an interpretation of the assessment results found in terms of student learning strengths and weaknesses):

The two courses assessed for Oral and Writing respectively showed that students seemed to meet the Oral communication requirement more readily than the Writing requirement. The weakest area to improve on for Oral is supporting material, which has to do with student's proficiency with the philosophical texts, and that weakness is also shown in Writing as well. The reason for the lower scoring in Writing could be attributed to the difficulty of the philosophical texts that were required of students to read and interpret and the peculiar philosophical writing style. Since none of the upper division philosophy courses have any prerequisites, in principle students could take a 300 level OC or a 400 level WI course as their first philosophy course and that adds difficulty to not only teaching OC or WI, but also teaching the content as well. And when students did not have a clear understanding of the text, naturally students were unable to use the supporting material effectively in their oral or writing assignments.

In addition, the discipline of Philosophy has its own peculiar writing style, which often times is interpretative and argumentative, instead of summative. This sort of philosophical writing requires students not only to write well mechanically or to summarize the text, but to present a coherent argument to defend their own original interpretation of the already difficult and dense text. Philosophical writing requires a second order thinking, which for some students who have no prior experience in philosophy is especially difficult to grasp. But since Philosophy is a small concentration with only one full-time teaching faculty, it cannot afford to put prerequisites on any of the upper division courses.

One possible remedy to consider is to hire additional full-time faculty members in order to expand the range of courses in order to increase the number of majors in Philosophy. Once the Philosophy Concentration has a viable number of majors in Philosophy, then putting a prerequisite on upper division courses will be more do-able and will also serve both majors and non-majors better.