

3)

(What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes have been achieved more or less well?)

In school year 2021-2022, our department began a new, multi-year initiative to assess the success of the Philosophy of the Person program. The members of our undergraduate committee decided to begin by focusing on the first learning goal: "Students completing the Philosophy core will be able to understand the historical origins of values and principles that ground, and are questioned, in contemporary culture." Our plan is to focus on each of the additional learning goals in the coming years. (NB: Philosophy of the Person is a sequential, two-semester sequence. The vast majority of students in Phil Person take Phil Person I in the fall, and Phil Person II in the spring, and have the same instructor for both semesters).

To assess the program's degree of success in meeting the first learning goal, we did two things. First, we added two questions to the student evaluation

The assignments we received were then read and evaluated by a group of four part-time instructors, each of whom has extensive experience teaching the Philosophy of the Person. The evaluators were: Margarita Fenn, Stephen Mendelsohn, James Oldfield, and Paul Van Rooy.

At the end of this document, we have attached (a) the three-question rubric that we asked these evaluators to use for each of the submitted assignments, and (b) the results of the evaluation. In addition to assigning numerical values, each of the four evaluators wrote several paragraphs providing their thoughts on the submissions, the assessment process, and possible improvements to both the course and the assessment process.

- 4) (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

This evidence was reviewed by the DUS and undergraduate committee. Our current DUS is on parental leave in fall 2022, so the evaluation process has been slowed, but will resume in earnest in spring 2023.

- 5) (What were the major assessment findings? Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? How did the assessment data contribute to those changes?)

See below for further

part of this particular learning objective. Specifically, two of the prompts ask students to summarize portions of the course texts, but did not explicitly ask them to draw connections between the texts and “contemporary culture”. On the other hand, several prompts asked students to apply principles found in the texts to specific contemporary events or problems. These prompts seemed more clearly aligned with both components of the learning objective.

Ultimately, I found it hard to compare the work of students who were asked, for example, to apply Mill’s utilitarianism to a contemporary problem (and perhaps misstated the basics of the theory) with those who were merely asked to summarize, or produce an abstract evaluation of, some element of Mill’s argument and nothing more. In my opinion, neither work provides evidence that the student achieved the learning objective, though in the case of the second, this is because the assessment itself wasn’t designed to measure both elements of the objective.

One thing I did notice across the group were problems of basic misunderstanding that I also find among my students. For example, using consequentialist reasoning to apply the categorical imperative, overlooking/not grasping the technical (sometimes narrow & counter-intuitive) definitions given to key terms, like “freedom”, in the texts, and/or describing Mill’s utilitarianism in act-utilitarian terms (whether he can maintain that position consistently is a scholarly question, but the text IMO pretty clearly expresses a rule-utilitarian view). I can’t say whether these misunderstandings are noticed by all other instructors. However, if these (and other misunderstanding) are recognized by many instructors teaching these texts, I wonder whether it would be helpful to catalog some of them (at least for the core texts in the course), and make a collective effort to develop shared resources or opportunities for instructors of Philosophy of the Person to improve basic understanding of the course texts.

I concur both with Paul’s interpretation of the learning objective and the general difficulty in applying a general standard of assessment across the assignments that I reviewed. Some of the assignments were very specifically aligned with the breakdown of the learning objective, according to the three questions that we have been tasked to respond to. That is, on the one hand, some of the assignments prompted students to BOTH explain a general theory or idea from a given philosopher or set of philosophers and to apply those theories or ideas to a relevant contemporary issue – which students were able to do with varying 7 () JTJ ET (g) 8 0 0.24 12.2457 589.9143 cm BT 50 0 0 50 250 -1190457 589

something they believe is relevant. Both strategies seem to yield the similar degrees of success with respect to the learning objective – provided that sufficient guidance and instruction is provided by the instructor via the prompt.

In addition to the general misunderstandings that Paul mentions in his assessment, which I find are sometimes common in my classes as well, I did notice another pattern across many of the assignments – especially as it relates to the first question we were to respond to in our assessments. That is, I found that under a charitable reading of many of the assignments, general understanding

philosophy beyond the fact that some philosophers (or their English translators, as the case may be) capitalize the words Self and Other.

In both sorts of cases, it was difficult to discern just how far the student's historical awareness (to the extent that such awareness was visible) was contributing to their understanding of the contemporary discussions with which they engaged (if they did indeed engage with such discussions). It was rare, therefore, to see the learning goal achieved to a high level. My first reflection on this conclusion is the (perhaps unhelpful) thought that achieving the sort of complementarity I have been focusing on here is rather difficult to do at the introductory level, and that even modest success in this regard is still very worthwhile for students. My second reflection is that individual instructors both conceive of success in this area in quite different ways and prioritize it to different extents. In addition, they are probably dynamic in this regard – I think that a developing sense of these things is part of growing as a teacher. My third and final reflection is that the department should do what it can to bring that ongoing debate about what counts as success from the intrapersonal level to the communal level. Currently that conversation is limited to the teaching seminar, informal chats in the hallways, and once-a-decade debates about required texts.

evaluation form. A second disparity in the group of assignments was that some assignments seemed to be longer final papers and others were shorter written exercises. What a student can display and produce in a two-page exercise written in a day most likely will be different qualitatively from what she produces in a month in a final six-page paper.