Academic Year: 2016-2017

Course Name/Catalog Number: PHIL 242

General Education Component: Second-Year Seminar

UULO(s) assessed this year:
- ☑ Intellectual Breadth/Life-long Learning
- ☑ Inquiry/Critical Thinking
- ☑ Communication
- ☐ Global/Multicultural Knowledge and Awareness
- ☐ Citizenship & Ethics

Other learning outcomes assessed this year: Click here to enter text.

Process:
For this year’s assessment plan, revised our process in a way that we believed would lead to more concrete and useful information that will immediately help our instructors improve their approach to guiding students to attain the UULOs.

Last year, we assessed a random sample of student papers from each section using a rubric measuring a range of goals under both the Critical Thinking and Communication UULOs. This plan yielded some interesting information, e.g. that student papers only rarely address potential objections to their thesis. In discussing these results with the instructors, it became clear that the reason student papers rarely address objections is that they are rarely asked in assignment instructions to write papers with this more sophisticated dialectical structure. The instructors agreed that it would be beneficial to seek ways to encourage papers with this structure.

However, it is also clear that our specific assessment process was not essential to reach these conclusions and recommendations. Rather, these were easily predictable once we identified the response to objections as an important goal in teaching critical thinking in the context of the Second Year Seminar. That is, the most valuable work was actually achieved in discussing goals for the course rather than in assessing individual papers. For this reason, we modified our assessment process for this year to include a process for instructors to share their own experience with devising writing assignments that are effective in teaching the UULOs. That said, we did not abandon the assessment of random papers with a rubric. We again assessed a selection of papers using the questions that produced the most uniform scores from assessors last year.

So our assessment process this year had two components. First, there was the sharing of writing assignments among the instructors. All five instructors were asked to share (via google docs) a virtual presentation that includes (1) one or two writing assignment instructions (e.g. paper topics) and (2) a narrative describing how the assignment was devised to meet challenges in teaching Communication under the Second Year Seminar umbrella. Other instructors were then encouraged to review the
documents and ask question in this virtual space. The idea was to create a formal process to allow for the sharing of teaching experience among the instructors.

The second component was the assessment of student papers using a rubric. Each instructor was asked to assess two randomly selected student papers from the final written assignment in the most recent semester in which they taught the course. Eight sections were assessed. We carried over from last year the two rubric questions with the greatest inter-assessor reliability: (1) Does the paper have an identifiable thesis? (2) Is the paper organized into paragraphs corresponding to discrete topics? Assessors scored the paper with a ‘2’ if the answer was ‘yes,’ ‘0’ if the answer was ‘no,’ and ‘1’ if the answer was ‘sort of, but not adequately.’

Results:
The rubric-based assessment of student papers produced results very similar to last year. There was a small increase in the average score regarding whether the paper has a thesis (from 1.83 to 1.93). Notably, almost all papers had a clearly identifiable thesis, while none clearly lacked a thesis. Regarding the second question, no papers showed a clear lack of organization by paragraphs. However, a third of papers were borderline in this area. This suggests some room for improvement. However, given small number of instructors and sections in this course, it is not clear how statistically significant these results are.

Each instructor shared assignments via a virtual seminar presentation on google docs. This worked well for the initial sharing, but the venue did not produce as much interaction among instructors as expected or desired.

Conclusions:
Based on the rubric assessment, instructors can be encouraged to stress to students the importance of a clear organization of essays into paragraphs. Given the lack of interaction on the virtual seminar space, an in-person meeting and discussion seems like it would be a more productive venue for the sharing of instructor experience regarding the assignments that address the UULOs. In fact, the instructors will meet in early Fall 2017 to continue the discussion that was started online and thus to complete the 2016-17 assessment plan. (Due to summer break, it was not feasible to alter the assessment process before the need to submit this report.) One instructor already plans to make substantial changes to his assignments based on a discrepancy between what he and other instructors expected of students regarding the communication UULO (and writing, specifically).

Appendices:

Raw data from rubric-based assessment of student papers

| section/paper | 1.1 | 1.2 | 2.1 | 2.2 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 4.1 | 4.2 | 5.1 | 5.2 | 6.1 | 6.2 | 7.1 | 7.2 | 8.1 | 8.2 | (avg) |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| 1. thesis?    | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 1   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 1.93 |
| 2. paragraphs?| 2   | 2   | 1   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 1   | 1   | 1   | 1   | N/A | N/A | 1.64 |