STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT REPORT

SUBMITTED BY: MICHAEL BOYLAN
DATE: OCTOBER 2013

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE WHERE AND HOW ARE DATA AND DOCUMENTS USED TO GENERATE THIS REPORT BEING STORED:


ALL THE PAPERS ARE IN THE OFFICE OF THE CHAIR.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

List all of the program’s learning outcomes: (regardless of whether or not they are being assessed this year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Year of Last Assessment</th>
<th>Year of Next Planned Assessment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students demonstrate an awareness of the broad and deep understanding of issues concerning fundamental problem of human existence</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students demonstrate the ability to synthesize and assess ethical and moral arguments. This ability will allow personal exploration, development and application within an ethical framework.</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students articulate the role of reason in the understanding and in the creation of personal worldviews. Students can critically engage varied perspectives of the role of reason</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
</tr>
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<td>Inquiry: Students will conduct appropriate research to develop considered responses to questions about philosophical problems using their knowledge of philosophical claims and theories.</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
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Describe how the program’s outcomes support Marymount’s Mission, Strategic Plan, and relevant school plan:
As a liberal arts school in the Catholic tradition, philosophy stands at the heart of Marymount’s academic mission. The former president of the university continually named philosophy as one of the important areas of the strategic plan and the new liberal arts core. Philosophy also provides excellent preparation for later studies including law school and any study in the humanities. Our outcomes speak to these concerns. The new Liberal Arts Core demonstrates the significance of philosophy for Marymount’s Mission & Vision in light of requiring two courses for graduation. Our reorganization of the department’s curriculum enlarges the options for Philosophy-2 courses as well as offering 6 new Writing Intensive Courses (one of which will be offered each term). In our Program Review (draft completed) we have three planned steps to increase the number of our “making” upper level courses (1/3 are cancelled each year due to less than 10 enrolled students).

Provide a brief description of the assessment process used including strengths, challenges and planned improvements:
We are an independent department for the first time. This is our second year under this new organization. Last year Boylan put through a major re-organization of the curriculum (that the Department had approved). This year Boylan is already beginning to implement changes called for in the action plan of the Department Review.

Describe how the program implemented its planned improvements from last year:
Our new curriculum is in shape. However, 1/3 of our courses at the upper level do not make due to low enrollment. In our 2013 Department Review we plan to address this by: (a) lowering the number of courses necessary for the major and minor (thus making it easier to envision being a major or minor). This, we believe will increase the number of students in these courses; (b) lowering the number of students necessary to make one of our upper level courses (this has a cost component that is set out in the Department Review); (c) cutting the number of adjuncts teaching our courses from 39% to 20% (this will happen by hiring a post-doc on a 4-4 teaching schedule). Full time instructors excite students to take further courses because they are more involved with the university.

Provide a response to last year’s University Assessment Committee review of the program’s learning assessment report: (List each recommendation and provide a specific response to each).
During the only student learning assessment report that we have ever done as a department (since we were previously with Theology and we were not consulted in the assessment process by the combined department chair), we met our critical area1 learning outcomes. We partially met assessing learning outcomes. The comments said, “Good start on the new rubric. Could be more elaborate and operationally define what ‘strong,’ ‘adequate,’ and ‘marginal’ means. The members of the department have a common understanding about these terms as we discuss them in our department meetings. It is difficult to operationalize it too much as the
criteria are rather complicated. For example, I use a 250 page book to serve as a rubric in my own courses. We will discuss this with our outside representative during the last step of our program review.

Under ‘analysis’ we partially met our goals. The comments were “present the results so that we can understand what you mean by, “the senior thesis did not address the outcome as much as expected.” Since we are such a small department, we can acquire only a very small amount of data. In the last 5 years we have had 6 majors graduate. Two went on to graduate school. One did a year of service and then went to law school. One is visiting relatives for a year in Greece. Two we haven’t heard from. This is a data driven response.

Under Critical Area 3 (improving the curriculum) we did not meet this criteria under the year in question because we were transitioning out of the combined department and because I was on sabbatical for half the year. However in 2012-2013 we did a complete overhaul of our curriculum. Comments on using assessment to make improvements, “In addition to developing rubrics, it is not clear from this report if anything learned from last assessment was used to improve the program.” True, this is because prior to the 2012-2013 report on 2011-2012 the philosophy department was not involved in the assessment process. At this point in time, we feel we are doing a good job as measured by our rubric. We meet four times a year to discuss what is working well and what isn’t. I meet twice a year with the adjuncts and discuss the same thing. As philosophers we use conceptual analysis (qualitative, dialectic) to do this. This does not fit well onto a graph. This is the methodology of our field. To put another grid onto our assessment process would be artificial.

We partially met implementing improvements with these comments: “No evidence is provided on how improvements from previous assessments were implemented. There is an acknowledgement, but it is not complete.” As mentioned above, when assessment of philosophy was done by theology, it was not shared except in a general way. We did not participate in the process. Now that we are doing our own assessment, we will be able better to point to actual changes and track their implementation.

We partially met addressing recommendations, “previous recommendations to develop a rubric were addressed.”

Overall Comments: “It is not easy to assess an entire program based on the performance on one graduating senior. For the future, consider studying the performance of all philosophy majors (and maybe minors) in a way that shows the development of students’ mastery of learning outcomes.” We have no minors that we know of (at the September A&S chairs meeting Nyla Carney agreed to continue her push to give department chairs data on who is a second major and who is a minor). We can look at all majors (currently four) as well as the performance of our graduates (when the data are available). What this reveals is that we would like to have more majors and minors. We are developing three plans to achieve this.
We decided to revise what we would call a learning outcome as opposed to other more general goals of the department. Our old learning outcomes have thus become more general goals. Our learning outcomes have become more narrow: 1. To be able to read a philosophical text; 2. To be able to logically outline the logical arguments contained within that text; 3. To be able to formulate reactions that are then put into the form of a critical essay. These new outcomes are also reflected in our Departmental Review (a draft of which was completed—except for the external reviewer—prior to the creation of this report).
**Outcome and Past Assessment**

**Learning Outcome 1:** To be able to read a philosophical text;

Is this outcome being reexamined?  □ Yes  ❆ No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.

**Assessment Activity**

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<th>Performance Standard</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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| Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect. | Define and explain acceptable level of student performance. | Discuss the data collected and student population | 1) Describe the analysis process.  
2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable. |
| Student papers | We subjectively judge whether students in the class “get” the general drift of the authors | 5 essays from majors  
6 essays from Intro  
6 essays from PH 309 | Of the Majors: all five successfully had the general direction of the author.  
Of the Intro students, 5 of 6 had the general direction of the author.  
Of the Ethics Students (PH 309) 3 had the general direction, two had minor errors, one had at least one serious misreading |
Interpretation of Results

Extent this Learning Outcome has been achieved by students *(Use both direct and indirect measure results)*:
Our findings this term are on par with last year’s students had we chosen this outcome. In the opinion of the chair there has been no substantial change in over the past 11 years. Previously, when we recruited non-traditional students, they functioned like room parents to help the other students get it.

Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome: We have a very teaching-oriented faculty (a strength). Our full-time faculty teach at least two introductory classes each term and every third term we teach intro courses entirely (a strength). Opportunities for improvement include picking up the stragglers.

Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:
Taking a calling from the past (where we had the non-traditional students) the department has decided to implement (where appropriate) study groups in which students can talk with each other to better get the general drift of the authors. Also, where appropriate, these study groups will make presentations to the class on difficult topics.
### Outcome and Past Assessment

**Learning Outcome 2:** To be able to logically outline the logical arguments contained within that text;

Is this outcome being reexamined? □ Yes ☑ No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.

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| Student papers | We subjectively judge whether students in the class “get” the exact logical presentation reconstruction | 5 essays from majors 6 essays from Intro 6 essays from PH 309 | Of the majors 4 of 5 were able to do this. The one who was not able to perform at this level, is no longer in the program (though this is not the reason the student gave—the student said her parents wanted her in a professional program: secondary teaching). Of the intro students 5 of 6 achieved this. Of the ethics students 4 of 6 achieved this. |
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**Outcome and Past Assessment**

**Learning Outcome 3:** To be able to formulate reactions that are then put into the form of a critical essay.

**Is this outcome being reexamined?** ☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.

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**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome:**
We have a very teaching-oriented faculty (a strength). Our full-time faculty teach at least two introductory classes each term and every third term we teach into courses entirely (a strength). Opportunities for improvement include picking up the stragglers.

**Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:**
Well, we cannot use study groups for essay writing because that is an individual activity. The course grading system demands this. What we can hope for is that implementing our changes on the first two objectives along with the general rubric for essay writing: Michael Boylan, *Critical Inquiry* (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 2010) will be more accessible if they can master the second step: exact reconstruction of the argument. It is also possible that we can use some of our advanced students in the tutoring center. They used to ask me for that each year, but since the center has been merged into the Teaching Center, no one has called asking for these tutors. Well, I guess I should call them. N.b. I have e-mailed them with suggestions for student tutors, but none has been hired.