

General Education
Philosophical Reflections on Reality, Knowledge, and Value

Preliminary assessment

September 2014 - September 2015

In Spring 2015, the Department of Philosophy completed the assessment of the area learning outcome, which reads, “*Students will be able to articulate major philosophical ideas and describe their bearing on the Christian liberal arts.*” The assessment efforts were devoted to assessing student learning in relation to this GELO.

Indirect Assessment

The syllabus review for this GE area was conducted in the 2011-2012 academic year, which resulted in the area title, certification criteria, interpretive statement and SLO modification. The modified area document was approved by the Academic Senate in Fall 2012.

Direct Assessment:

At the end of the spring semester, Professor Jim Taylor assigned a 1000-word essay to all students (n=43) in his spring 2015 PH-006: Philosophical Perspectives class. The essay prompt (Appendix A) required students to reflect on the philosophical implications of the Christian liberal arts theme of responsible citizenship in God’s Kingdom and the Christian’s accountability, at the Last Judgment, for how he or she has lived his or her life. The students were allowed to choose among the following philosophical topics for this purpose: the mind/body problem, the problem of personal identity across time, the problem of freedom and determinism, and the question of whether we have a moral duty to benefit needy people. The assessment was conducted by the course instructor. Before completing the assignment students were familiarized with criteria that the instructor developed for evaluating their learning in relation to the area outcome.

Findings:

According to the assessment results, 13 of the 43 students (30%) demonstrated “highly developed” capacity; 10 (23%) showed “developed” capacity, 16 (37%) –“emerging,” and 4 (10%) were at the “initial” level. That means that the 75% benchmark has not been met since only 53% of all students showed either “developed” or “highly developed” results. However, the assessment sample was small, especially given that all Westmont students are required to fulfill this area requirement by taking a Philosophical Reflection course at Westmont (or, occasionally, at one of the CCCU or CCC schools) in order to graduate. The size of the sample made the results suggestive rather than conclusive.

Closing-the-Loop Actions:

In September of 2015, the Department of Philosophy had a preliminary conversation about closing the gap between the assessment results (53% students have shown at least “developed” capacity on this assignment) and the established benchmark for this outcome (75% of students to be able to demonstrate at least “developed” capacity). Conversation of this nature needs to be continued. The philosophy faculty agreed that a rubric needs to be developed for this essay

assignment. The rubric will be shared with the students before administering the assessment assignment and will assist the faculty in measuring student progress more accurately. For the next round of assessment scheduled for the 2019-2010 academic year, we need to construct a bigger sample, approximately 200-250 student essays, which will constitute 16% - 20% of our student population. Student results from the POL-030 and CS-050 courses need to be included in the area assessment.