Expected Outcomes: Argumentative Skills

Students will be able to: 1. distinguish valid and invalid arguments, consider and assess forms of inference, 2. track and understand lines of reasoning through various phases of a dialectic (e.g., distinguish claims, arguments, objections, replies, premises from conclusion, explanations from arguments, and so forth).

Related typical general education outcomes:

2  Analytical and Critical Reading
3  Ability to Critique Arguments
4  Ability to Construct Arguments

Assessment methods

Method: Written Work

Every final term paper in 4000-level classes is assessed during the grading process using a standard rubric.

Findings:

Written work demonstrates that this is a strength amongst our majors. Indeed, on average, their written work demonstrates that our students have stronger argumentative skills than they have writing skills.

How did you use findings for improvement?

See "Annual Discussion"

Additional comments:

None

Method: Annual Discussion

We devote at least one department meeting a year to discussing the students in our major and assessing their skills. This meeting relies partly on the impressions of faculty members, but also on information gathered from other assessment methods.

Findings:

Faculty judge that students have improved in this area, due in part to a greater emphasis on writing assignments.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Faculty are currently experimenting with various types of assignments, and especially multiple drafts of papers, more short assignments, and class presentations.

Additional comments:

None
Method: Student Assessment

Students are interviewed by the Department Chair and Faculty advisors about their impressions of how well the program has developed reading, writing, and argumentative skills in relation to their peers in other programs.

Findings:

Students have not been interviewed consistently. As a result, this method has yielded little information.

How did you use findings for improvement?

We are currently thinking about ways in which this method might be more usefully implemented, and especially how to encourage graduating students to participate in these interviews. As it is, it is mostly our better students who participate.

Additional comments:

None.

Expected Outcomes: Philosophical Knowledge

Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of the history of philosophy, contemporary metaphysics and epistemology, and axiology.

Related typical general education outcomes:

- Analytical and Critical Reading
- Informed and Engaged Citizenship
- Aesthetic Appreciation and Engagement

Assessment methods

Method: Annual Discussion

We devote at least one department meeting a year to discussing the students in our major and assessing their skills. This meeting relies partly on the impressions of faculty members, but also on information gathered from other assessment methods.

Findings:

Faculty judge that students demonstrate a basic knowledge of philosophy. We continue to struggle to teach across all major areas of philosophy, and especially philosophy of science.

How did you use findings for improvement?

None

Additional comments:

None

Method: Course Distribution

Students are required to take a sequence in the history of philosophy as well as courses in contemporary metaphysics and epistemology and in axiology. Assignments in these courses directly assess the extent to which students have acquired a certain amount of philosophical knowledge. Course distribution insures that the assessment has the appropriate breadth.
Expected Outcomes: Analytical Reading

Students will be able to extract arguments from primary texts, offer interpretations of texts that are both sympathetic and successful in making the issues and concerns of the text 'alive' from the standpoint of the contemporary reader, and contextualize the project of one text in relation to others with which it is in conversation.

Related typical general education outcomes:

2 Analytical and Critical Reading
3 Ability to Critique Arguments

Assessment methods

Method: Written Work

Every final term paper in 4000-level classes is assessed during the grading process using a standard rubric.

Findings:

Final term papers demonstrate that students have acquired these skills.

How did you use findings for improvement?

We did not, but see 'Annual Discussion'.

Additional comments:

None

Method: Annual Discussion

We devote at least one department meeting a year to discussing the students in our major and assessing their skills. This meeting relies partly on the impressions of faculty members, but also on information gathered from other assessment methods.

Findings:

Faculty report, as they have before, that students continue to rely on lectures and not on their readings. But this seems to have improved, and we suspect that is the result of our increased emphasis on assignments that test reading skills rather than lecture comprehension skills.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Faculty continue to experiment with ways to insure that students are reading and reading skillfully. Aside from short paper assignments, some faculty assign presentations to students so that every student is required to explain the reading for some class or classes. Faculty report
considerable success with this technique, and several others will employ this strategy in the future.

Additional comments:
None

Method: Student Assessment
Students are interviewed by the Department Chair and Faculty advisors about their impressions of how well the program has developed reading, writing, and argumentative skills in relation to their peers in other programs.

Findings:
See 'Student Assessment" under "Argumentative Skills"

How did you use findings for improvement?
None

Additional comments:
None

Expected Outcomes: Writing

Students will be able to: 1. clearly explain a philosophical problem, purported solutions to such and arguments in favor and against these; 2. offer critical discussion of these that goes beyond merely reporting; 3. argue for the claims one makes, where such arguments are valid and have premises that for which some reasonable attempt has been made to secure their plausibility; 4. articulate fully abstract claims in explicit, minimally-figurative language; 5. produce written work that sustains a coherent intellectual narrative and succeeds in including what is relevant and excluding what is not; 6. demonstrate a mastery of Standard Written English in matters of grammar, diction, and style.

Related typical general education outcomes:
4 Ability to Construct Arguments
6 Ability to Solve Open-Ended Problems
7 Written Communication

Assessment methods

Method: Written Work
Every final term paper in 4000-level classes is assessed during the grading process using a standard rubric.

Findings:
This has long been a perceived strength amongst our students. Written work over the past year demonstrates that our current students are, on average, even better.

How did you use findings for improvement?
See 'Annual Discussion"

Additional comments:
Method: Annual Discussion

We devote at least one department meeting a year to discussing the students in our major and assessing their skills. This meeting relies partly on the impressions of faculty members, but also on information gathered from other assessment methods.

Findings:

The Faculty judge that the increased emphasis on multiple drafts, including those self-reviewed and peer-reviewed using the Department’s rubric, has paid benefits. Students not only master the requisite skills to a reasonable degree, but seem to be improving at a greater pace.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Faculty have agreed to require multiple drafts for all 4000-level papers, and there is a consensus that this practice should be extended to all levels.

Additional comments:

Method: Student Assessment

Students are interviewed by the Department Chair and Faculty advisors about their impressions of how well the program has developed reading, writing, and argumentative skills in relation to their peers in other programs.

Findings:

See ‘Findings’ under "Argumentative Skills"

How did you use findings for improvement?

none

Additional comments:

none