

2018-2019
Department of Philosophy Student Learning Assessment Report
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Assessment Planning: Due to the Dean's Office by November 30, 2018

Department: Philosophy
Assessment Coordinator: Jessica Pfeifer

Department's/Program's Student Learning Objectives. Please report your department's Student Learning Objectives and indicate, where feasible, how these objectives correlate with the University's Functional Competencies:

UMBC Functional Competencies: (1) Written and Oral Communication (2) Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning (3) Critical Analysis and Reasoning (4) Technological Competency (5) Information Literacy.

1. Philosophical Content: Graduates will be familiar with the central concepts, questions, and historical figures of the Western philosophical tradition.
2. Critical Analysis and Reasoning: Graduates will be able to identify premises and conclusions of arguments, be able to critically analyze arguments, be able to consider alternative views, and be able to develop and defend their own views. [UMBC Function Competence: (3) Critical Analysis and Reasoning]
3. Logical Reasoning: Graduates will be able to apply formal techniques of reasoning. [UMBC Function Competence: (3) Critical Analysis and Reasoning]
4. Written and Oral Communication: Graduates will be able to write clear, well-organized, thorough, and succinct essays and be able to express philosophical concepts and arguments clearly in discussion. [UMBC Function Competence: (1) Written and Oral Communication]

Which SLO(s) is your department planning to assess this year? Are you assessing previous changes or acting on changes made in prior assessments?

2. Critical Analysis and Reasoning: Graduates will be able to identify premises and conclusions of arguments, be able to critically analyze arguments, be able to consider alternative views, and be able to develop and defend their own views. [UMBC Function Competence: (3) Critical Analysis and Reasoning]

How do you plan to assess this objective? Remember that your plan must include at least one direct measure, and that multiple measures give a more complete picture.

We plan to assess whether our introductory-level courses provide mastery of a basic skill needed to master our learning goal of Critical Analysis and Reasoning and thereby help prepare students for our 300-level courses, which require 1 course at the 100-level or 200-level as a prerequisite. In particular, we are interested in assessing whether students at the end of our 100 and 200-level

courses have mastered the ability to identify premises and conclusions of arguments. This is a basic skill needed to master the learning goal of Critical Analysis and Reasoning. Students who have not mastered this skill would not be well-prepared to take our 300-level courses. To assess this, we plan to directly assess students in our 100 and 200-level courses by asking them to identify premises and conclusions in a number of arguments toward the end of the semester to determine whether they have mastered this learning goal. This will also enable us to localize problems, if there are any, and to assess whether our 100- and 200-level courses are achieving this important learning goal.

Assessment Report (due June 30, 2019):

What was assessed?

In Spring 2019, the Philosophy Department SLO (2) Critical Analysis and Reasoning: Graduates will be able to identify premises and conclusions of arguments, be able to critically analyze arguments, be able to consider alternative views, and be able to develop and defend their own views. [UMBC Function Competence: (3) Critical Analysis and Reasoning]. We did this by assessing all non-honors sections of PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy, PHIL 150: Contemporary Moral Issues, and PHIL 152: Introduction to Moral Theory. Our goal was to determine whether students have mastery of what premises and conclusions are and also to assess whether they have mastered the ability to identify premises and conclusions of arguments. Both are essential to master the learning goal of Critical Analysis and Reasoning and are essential to preparing students for 300-level Philosophy courses.

How were data collected? Which direct measures were used?

Students in all non-honors sections of PHIL100, PHIL 150, and PHIL 152 were asked to complete an online test (which was not part of their grade). Students in all sections of all three courses were given the same online test. Students were tested on their understanding of what premises and conclusions are (Question 1 on the online test) and also their ability to distinguish premises and conclusions in specific arguments (Questions 2 and 3 on the online test).

What were your findings? If relevant, how do these findings relate to past assessment findings? Is there other contextual information to help make sense of these findings?

See Table 1. 176 (26%) of students enrolled in these courses participated. 94.5% of students responding got correct answers for Question 1, which tested their knowledge of what premises and conclusions are. However, students did less well in identifying conclusions of arguments (Questions 2 and 3). Only 51.1% of students got correct answers to both Questions 2 and 3; 63.6% of students answered Question 2 correctly, and 73.9% of students answered Question 3 correctly. It is possible that the questions used to test the students' ability were too difficult, but it also indicates that at least as measured in this assessment, there is room for improvement in helping students master this fundamental learning goal. Students ought to be able to pick out premises and conclusions in arguments before they go on to take 300-level

courses in the Philosophy Department. It is also interesting to note that those who got correct answers to Question 1 did not do better at identifying conclusions of arguments. See Table 2. This indicates that learning what premises and conclusions are does not appear sufficient to enable a student to locate conclusions in arguments. It is also important to note students in PHIL 100 and PHIL 152 appear to do a better job than those in PHIL 150. See Table 1. This might indicate that different methods are used in these courses that might be instituted in other 100 level courses to help students master the ability to pick out conclusions in arguments, though more data would need to be gathered to determine this. There was also a significant difference in response rates between the courses. See Table 3.

What preliminary suggestions (if any) is the Assessment Committee making to the department?

The Assessment Committee recommends that the Department guide instructors of 100 and 200 level courses to teach students what premises and conclusions are and separately teach students how to identify conclusions of arguments. Recognizing that students might have sufficient understanding of what premises and conclusions are and still not be able to pick out conclusions or premises in specific examples of argument should help instructors of our 100 and 200 level courses do a better job of teaching students to master this important skill. The Assessment Committee also recommends looking more closely at what instructors in these courses are actually doing to teach these skills so that the Department might be able to assess which of these methods might be most effective in helping students master the ability to pick out premises and conclusions of arguments.

Table 1

	PHIL 100	PHIL 150	PHIL 152	Overall
% of Correct Answers to Question 1	91.8%	89.7%	88.2%	91.5%
% of Incorrect Answers to Question 1	7.2%	10.3%	11.8%	7.4%
% of No Response to Question 1	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%
% of Correct Answers to Question 2	63.4%	58.6%	70.6%	63.6%
% of Incorrect Answers to Question 2	36.6%	41.4%	29.4%	36.4%
% of No Response to Question 2	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
% of Correct Answers to Question 3	74.6%	65.5%	88.2%	73.9%
% of Incorrect Answers to Question 3	24.6%	34.5%	11.8%	25.6%
% of No Response to Question 3	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
% of Students Who Got Both Question 2 and Question 3 Correct	51.5%	41.4%	64.7%	51.1%

Table 2

% of students with Q1 correct who got both Q2 & Q3 correct	51.55%
% of students with Q1 incorrect who got both Q2 & Q3 correct	53.85%

Table 3

Course	Enrollment	Number of Responses	Response Rate
PHIL 100	409	134	32.76%
PHIL 150	80	29	36.25%
PHIL 152	199	17	8.54%
Total Responses	688	176*	25.58%

*4 of the respondents were in more than one course -- 2 of those taking PHIL 100 were also taking PHIL 150 and 2 of those taking PHIL 100 were also taking PHIL 152; their data was included in both courses, though they were not double counted in the overall data.