General Education Assessment Report
2019-2021 Results for Philosophy

Executive Summary

In January 2021, faculty assessed 60 artifacts to determine the extent to which students were achieving the specified outcomes for general education in Philosophy courses. Both outcomes met or exceeded the standard less than a third of the time. Raters recommended that faculty align assignment prompts to the outcomes. Raters also recommended that assignments be revised to provide greater clarity and structure for students.

Philosophy Assessment Report

As part of Old Dominion University's general education requirements, students must complete 3 credit hours of Philosophy & Ethics courses at the lower or upper division. The criteria approved by Faculty Senate for P courses includes:

    A. Students will be able to explain major theories or concepts in one or more of the major areas of philosophy, e.g., metaphysics, epistemology, logic, or value theory.
    B. Students will be able to use analytical tools, such as reflection, comparison, or argumentation, to engage in critical thinking.

Recommendations from the previous assessment in 2013-14 were used to inform this cycle of planning and assessment for Philosophy. See table 1 below for recommendations and associated actions.

Table 1. Philosophy assessment recommendations and actions

2013-14 Recommendations	Actions
Exchange assignments with colleagues and discuss the pedagogy of addressing the outcomes in courses.	Faculty exchanged pedagogy ideas while receiving peer feedback on an assignment and its grading criteria during an assignment redesign workshop in spring 2019.

Methodology

A rubric developed by faculty teaching P courses was used to assess Philosophy outcomes. The rubric was created based on faculty feedback and philosophy literature. In fall 2019 and spring 2020, faculty teaching general education Philosophy courses were asked how and where students demonstrated the Philosophy outcomes. Faculty members were able to identify an artifact or a series of artifacts that aligned with the outcomes and were embedded within the courses.

In spring 2020, the University switched to remote learning in March because of COVID-19 concerns. Due to the disruption and discussion with faculty it was decided not to use data from the spring 2020 semester. Faculty determined that data from the fall 2019 semester would be representative and useful for decision making. Artifacts were sampled from all PHIL 110P courses.

A two-day assessment summit was convened in January 2021, where four faculty, read and rated a random sample of student artifacts from P courses. During the morning of the first day, a calibration session was conducted. First, faculty thoroughly reviewed and discussed the rubric and then independently applied the rubric to three sample artifacts. Raters shared their ratings and discussed any differences that arose after each "round" of rating. This discussion helped faculty come to a common understanding of what the student learning outcomes (SLO) meant and what to look for when rating the artifacts using the rubric's scale: exceeds standard, meets standard, approaches standard, needs attention. Once individual ratings on a shared artifact did not differ by more than one point, raters were given a set of 30 artifacts to rate. The artifacts were read twice by faculty and scored using the rubric. If faculty ratings differed by more than one point on the majority (50% or more) of the outcomes, the artifact was sent to a third reader.

Three of the 60 artifacts reviewed required a third read due to discrepancies in ratings. A full description of the methodology, including inter-rater reliability data and the rubric, will be made available on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Assessment's website: https://tinyurl.com/geneduc

Results
An overview of the findings by SLO is presented in Figure 1. The highest rated Philosophy outcome was *explaining major theories or concepts in one or more of the major areas of philosophy, e.g., metaphysics, epistemology, logic, or value theory* (SLO A: 28% exceeds and meets standards; 72% approaches standards and needs attention). The lowest rated outcome was *using analytical tools, such as reflection, comparison, or argumentation, to engage in critical thinking* (SLO B: 24% exceeds and meets standards; 76% approaches standards and needs attention).

Figure 1. Philosophy assessment results
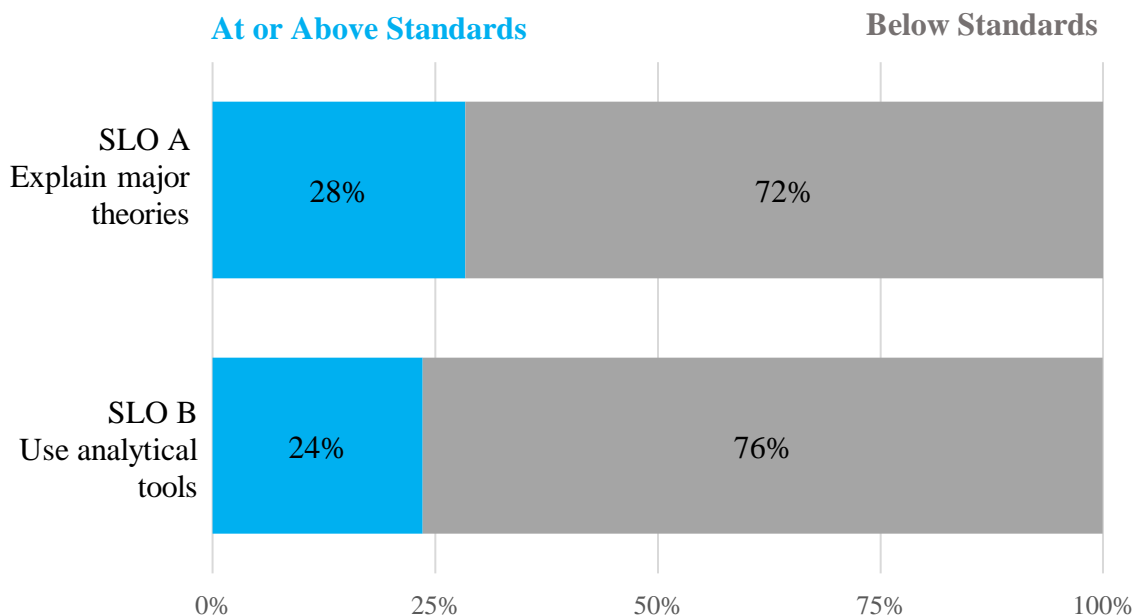
Faculty Rater Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion
At the end of the second day, faculty were asked to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of students. Overall, faculty noted that students were frequently incomplete in the way they elaborated on concepts and theories. Students demonstrated partial or ineffective explanations by accurately describing part of the concepts but failing to accurately describe all of it (SLO A). Faculty noted that students didn't seem prepared to make clear distinctions between concepts. Students also demonstrated a partial or ineffective use of analytical tools (SLO B). Faculty noted that students were not using the analytical tools they are being taught in class to accurately complete the assignments. One faculty member noted that some assignments seemed to ask students to do too much in too little space. Others noted that assignments with more student choice tended to be challenging for students and they struggled to demonstrate the outcomes. Overall, faculty found that the assignments that asked for a comparison between more than one viewpoint or theory and assignments with more structure seemed to be better for students. These assignments yielded a better demonstration of the outcomes.

Recommendations
Faculty raters identified the following recommendations to improve Philosophy outcomes:

Teaching or Assignments
- Align assignment prompts to the outcomes.
- Revise assignments to provide greater clarity and structure for students. This provides them with a path to demonstrate the outcomes.
- Provide examples, directions, and descriptions of meeting the standard for each of the outcomes (e.g. if we're going to ask them to be "clear and precise" we have to tell them what clear and precise means).
- Support faculty discussion and revision of course syllabi and assignments to strengthen development of the Philosophy student learning outcomes.

Assessment Process
- Consider expanding the rubric scale to accommodate more nuance with a category between meets and approaches standard.

Faculty Senate Recommendations

Plan to Improve Learning
[to be completed by the department by Summer 2021]