

Assessing Departmental Learning Goals through Direct Assessment Techniques February 24, 2009

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❖ Learning Goal to be Assessed:

- **The ability to answer major philosophical questions from at least two different philosophical perspectives, historical periods, or traditions:**
 - **What is knowledge? What does it mean to know something?**
 - **What does it mean to live a good life?**
 - **What is the self? Who am I?**
 - **What is (the nature of) reality? What is real?**
- We further wanted to know whether students' own thoughts and internalized ways of thinking ("habits of mind") were influenced by at least two different traditions.

❖ Assignment Questions (senior seminar):

- **In three distinct postings, sketch out your own current (1) metaphysical views, (2) epistemological views, and (3) ethical views. For each, list two philosophers who have influenced you the most in developing your own thinking about these questions.**
 - **Metaphysical views:**
 - **What is (the nature of) reality? What is real, and in what way(s)?**
 - **What is the self? Who am I?**
 - **Epistemological views:**
 - **What is knowledge? What does it mean to know something?**
 - **What is truth?**
 - **Ethical views:**
 - **What does it mean to live a good life?**
 - **What is justice?**
 - **What is right?**
 - **What is goodness, or excellence?**
 - **And for each...**
 - **Who are two philosophers who have most influenced your ... views, either positively (contributing ideas that you have incorporated), or "negatively," by providing a point of view that you have argued against in a way that helped you to clarify your own position? Also, describe briefly what philosophical traditions those two philosophers speak from.**

❖ Note the Difference...

➤ Learning Goal

- The ability to answer major philosophical questions from at least two different philosophical perspectives, historical periods, or traditions.

➤ Assignment

- Who are two philosophers who have most influenced your views? Also, describe briefly what philosophical traditions those two philosophers speak from.

❖ Additional Context: Self-Assessment Grading

➤ “It should be noted that these essay assignments were deliberately constructed to be informal, rather than formal academic essays. Furthermore, the students in this course had considerable latitude in constructing their own learning goals, and the grading for this course was based on Laura Rediehs’s system of Guided Self-Assessment. This context was set deliberately in order to give us a more accurate read on what the students really found most meaningful, and how much they had or had not internalized certain habits of rigor. More formally-structured and graded assignments can give valuable information too, but such a context encourages students to write what they think the professor wants to hear. Such essays would show what students can do when pushed, but may in that process mask what is really most meaningful to them. In addition, when all students are striving to reach an acceptable level of academic rigor, we cannot distinguish between those who have internalized such rigor into their normal everyday way of being, and those who only do so on demand” (from Philosophy Department Assessment Report, Fall 2007).

- Students were not prompted to refer to two *different* traditions.
- Students were not being graded on how accurately they understood the philosophers or traditions they discussed.

❖ Our Findings

➤ “In these essays, the students were simply asked to identify two philosophers who have influenced them the most. The assignments did not specify that they had to draw from two *different* philosophical perspectives, historical periods, or traditions, but we found that the students did do so spontaneously. Overall, students showed a good working understanding of the perspectives they worked with, and also demonstrated the ability to compare different philosophical perspectives with respect to a given theme” (Philosophy Department Assessment Report, Fall 2007).