

## Philosophy Learning Outcomes Pilot Study

### Introduction:

The following are the results of the pilot study for Philosophy in gathering indirect evidence of student learning; that is student self-perception of their level of learning in outcomes associated with general education, active learning, mission of the college, and department specific goals. Normally, student survey data is measured against Faculty Information Form (FIF) data to assess students' perceptions of their learning compared to how well faculty felt they addressed particular goals in their courses, however no faculty members from the Philosophy department submitted their forms so this analysis is not included. Student data was collected from 47 surveys submitted by students who were taking Philosophy classes in the spring of 2008.

In order to present the data in a concise and familiar format, the model is based on the output of the Course and Instruction Evaluation Forms the faculty receive at the end of each semester. However, the reporting scale on this survey differs from the evaluation forms. The ranks used on these evaluations were: rank 5 for students who felt they significantly improved in a particular learning goal, rank 4 for above average improvement, rank 3 for average improvement, rank 2 for somewhat, rank 1 for students feeling as if they did not improve at all in a particular area, and rank 6 for a question not applying to the course.

### Report Organization:

The frequencies of responses for each rank are reported on the data sheets under the Course Evaluations sections. Some surveys had blanks or multiple bubbles filled in, and while not included in this report, they are counted toward the total of n=47. In order to be consistent with the format of the Course and Instruction Evaluation forms, which present data on percent (%) below good, included on this report are percent below average ( $\% < 3$ ), and percent above average ( $\% > 3$ ) for comparison. These percentages do not take into account rankings of 6 (does not apply), or 3 (average.)

There is one section to this report, which includes all of the frequencies of responses, % above and below average, and student means. This primary section is broken into the following sub-sections: General Education Learning Goals, Active Learning Goals, College Mission Goals, and Philosophy course goals. These sub-sections represent all forms of learning pedagogy valued by the college. All percentages reported at 50% or more above average are shaded, and represent perceived best learning achieved by students.

When examining the data, keep in mind that all Philosophy classes were analyzed together.

### Summary of Findings:

In terms of the department's support of the college General Education learning goals, Philosophy appears to be meeting only a few. The specialized focus of most Philosophy courses could be partially responsible for the low student means and perceived learning in this area. For most of the college goals, Philosophy courses tended to have high values for the "does not apply" category.

According to the data on General Education, improvement in critical reading was the only General Education learning goal that students reported was met by the Philosophy courses they were in. While some of the learning goals, like improving artistic sensitivity, do not necessarily apply to all Philosophy courses, there are some areas that might apply and where there is a possibility for development. For example, 30% of students reported that they improved in problem solving. Not all Philosophy address areas relating to problem solving, but logic and ethical dilemmas might allow students to gain some insight into basic problem solving techniques. It is also interesting to note that while several of the Philosophy specific course goals appear to be cross-discipline (history, politics, etc.), only 28% of students reported that they improved in their ability to think across disciplines. This result might be because of how content specific philosophy courses are, or because students misinterpreted the question. More data might be gathered to determine why students do not feel this goal is given focus specifically in relation to linked Philosophy specific course goals. In general, low averages should be acknowledged and if possible addressed, especially when the students report that 90% of the General Education goals are not being well attended to in their courses.

The college continues to value more student centered, active learning pedagogies such as discussion, oral presentation and collaboration with others. Based on this data, Philosophy courses do not appear to be addressing these goals well, but without the FIF data, the intent of the faculty is not known. That said, what the data indicates is that 43% of the students reported they improved in discussion, which is decent, but could be improved upon. Beyond discussion, only 19% of the students surveyed reported they improved in oral presentation, which seems low especially when compared to the Philosophy specific course goals relating to argumentation and rhetoric. In addition, only 11% of students believed they improved in their ability to work with others. Since ethics and ethical standards are both internal and external forces, collaboration with others would seem to factor into ethical problem solving. Since 29 students, over half of those surveyed, reported that oral presentations did not apply to their courses and 26 students, almost half of those surveyed, reported that collaboration with others did not apply to their courses, the low percentage of student learning could be due to students opting to give a low ranking instead of claiming these goals did not apply to their course. However, the high rate of students choosing to select "Does not apply," might be something worth examining in the student centered learning goal section because of the possible relationships to Philosophy specific course goals. If there is a link between Philosophy specific goals and the student centered learning goals then more stress could be placed on these goals going forward.

Students reported that none of the college mission goals were well addressed in their classes. The areas where the most improvement is needed are in addressing the goal of improving leadership ability, accepting the challenges of creative visions, and in forming connections among people. In addition, many philosophy classes satisfy written communication requirements, but only 30% of students reported that they improved in responsible and effective communication. Like the active learning goals, many of the college mission goals had high rates of people responding with "Does not apply."

The data related to the Philosophy specific goals indicates that more than half of the students achieved a greater than average improvement in four of the five goals. While none of the instances of best learning are over 65%, the fact that most Philosophy courses are content specific could result in a

reduced number of students reporting that they improved in areas which were program goals but not directly addressed by their particular course. Three of the Philosophy specific course goals have fairly high numbers of students responding with “Does not apply,” which would lower the overall percentage of students who reported their learning was above average.

“Best Expectations” is an area which shows very positive results. In all three categories relating to course expectations, students reported they knew what to anticipate before taking the course. The only area that might need attention is students’ access to materials before the class begins since only 53% of students reported they had better than average advance information.

Further analysis of the data presented on the following sheets is the providence of the Philosophy department at Mills. Since this is our pilot study, and we plan to do an analysis for all departments in the future, we likely cannot do such complete reports in the future. Therefore, we would like to request feedback on what data and information you found valuable. What was useful and how? What do you wish we had included in the report? Do you like the structure? Please, e-mail [aknudsen@mills.edu](mailto:aknudsen@mills.edu) with feedback on this report. Thank you.