Bergen Community College
Assessment Report for 2010-2012

Department/Program: Philosophy and Religion/Arts, Humanities, Wellness Division

Department Chair: George Cronk

Liaison: Tobyn De Marco

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Program(s), if applicable (AAS, Interdepartmental, etc.):

Mission/Goal statement of the department or program:
[the entire mission and goals are included here]

The mission of the BCC Philosophy and Religion faculty is to provide students with a substantial and educationally meaningful program of philosophical and religious studies through well-designed and well-taught on-campus, online, and partially online (hybrid) courses.

Intellectual Skills

An integral feature of our mission – both in Philosophy and in Religious Studies – is to impress upon students the value of critical thought and the value of precision in the use of language and to help them develop the habit of thinking, speaking, and writing with logical rigor and clarity. To that end,

1. we seek to base all philosophy and religion courses on the reading and discussion of the writings of major philosophical and religious thinkers (i.e., on primary sources rather than on textbooks, either in anthology form or in the form of "great books" or "classic texts"), including, in the case of religion, the study of the sacred scriptures of the major religions of the world;
2. we incorporate in all philosophy and religion courses the teaching of basic principles and methods of logical reasoning and/or critical thinking as well as techniques of academic research and writing; and
3. we require students in all philosophy and religion courses to do a substantial amount of expository, analytic, and critical writing in response to the materials studied in the courses.

Instructional Methods

In carrying out our mission, we utilize instructional methods calculated to meet the educational needs of all students, recognizing that there is a diversity of learning styles among BCC students. We organize the learning process through appropriate combinations of lectures, group discussions, collaborative learning processes and projects, audio-visual presentations (videos, PowerPoint presentations, carefully-

designed reading and writing assignments [papers, tests, library research projects, etc.]).

Student Learning Goals

We seek diligently to assist and encourage our students in the achievement of the following student learning goals in philosophy and in religion:

1. Philosophy:

- Students will identify and analyze the basic problems of philosophy in the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory.
- Students will demonstrate a sound working knowledge of the basic principles of logic and the ability to incorporate them in their analyses of philosophical issues.
- Students will state and support their own views on philosophical issues logically, coherently, concisely, and clearly, both orally and in writing.

2. Religion:

- Students will explain the relationship between religion and culture.
- Students will apply academic methodologies to the study of religion.
- Students will analyze sacred texts and traditions recognizing the various hermeneutical approaches.
- Students will defend positions on religious issues with critical precision, clarity, and rigor, both orally and in writing.

The mission statement of the Department of Philosophy and Religion is consistent with and supportive of the overall Mission and Goals statement of Bergen Community College and gives special support to the elements in that statement that are underlined below: [underlining of BCC Mission and Goals]

The Bergen Community College program in Philosophy and Religion provides students with opportunities to study in two related but distinct fields of academic inquiry: (1) philosophy and (2) religious studies.

The BCC program in Philosophy introduces students to the basic principles and techniques of logical thinking and argumentation, to the history of philosophical thought, to the basic problems of philosophy (What is real? What can be known? What is really worthwhile?), and to a set of methods by which contemporary moral, social, and political problems may be clearly understood and perhaps resolved.

Philosophy Program Goals

1. Students will identify and analyze the basic problems of philosophy in the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory.
2. Students will demonstrate a sound working knowledge of the basic principles of logic and the ability to incorporate them in their analyses of philosophical issues.
3. Students will state and support their own views on philosophical issues logically, coherently, concisely, and clearly, both orally and in writing.

The Religious Studies program introduces students to the basic problems and methods of theology; to the sacred literatures of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other religious traditions; and to the history, basic beliefs, and characteristic practices of the major religions of the world.

Religion Program Goals

1. Students will explain the relationship between religion and culture.
2. Students will apply academic methodologies to the study of religion.

3. Students will analyze sacred texts and traditions recognizing the various hermeneutical approaches.
4. Students will defend positions on religious issues with critical precision, clarity, and rigor, both orally and in writing.

Create the Assessment Plan

Goal or learning objective being assessed:

On the advice of Vice President Peter Dlugos, the PHR Department assessed the Humanistic Perspective Course Criteria (the relevant one for PHR) from the New Jersey State-wide GECC committee and Academic Officer's Association ("Any broad-based course(s) in the appreciation of art, music, or theater; literature; foreign language; history; philosophy and/or religious studies.") student learning goal 6 Humanistic Perspective (Humanities): "Students will analyze works in the fields of art, music, or theatre; history ...; literature; and philosophy and/or religious studies; and will gain competence in the use of a foreign language. a. Students will describe commonly used approaches and criteria for analyzing works [in the aforementioned relevant fields]. b. Students will analyze works and applying commonly used approaches and criteria [sic]. c. Students will demonstrate a value added competence in the production and comprehension of a foreign language." The PHR Department chose learning goal (b.).

Relevant Core Competencies: (check as many as apply)

Communication X	Quantitative Reasoning	**Critical Thinking X**
Civic Responsibility	Technological and Information Fluency	Personal Skills
Interpersonal Skills	Creativity and Aesthetic Appreciation	Applied Knowledge

Means of Assessment:

The PHR Department decided that three courses from our repertory are particularly relevant for this General Education Foundation learning goal, and are introductory: PHR-101, PHR-120, PHR-121. Participation was voluntary. Professors submitted to Assessment Liaison the results of graded expositional essays. The essay assignment was focused on the analysis and exposition of a significant philosophical or religious studies work (or excerpt thereof). Written essays are the primary way in which students display knowledge and application of skills in humanities courses (especially in philosophy and religious studies). A rubric was used by all participating professors for judging the philosophical/religious studies content (grasp of the philosophical and/or religious ideas at issue). The rubric was originally developed by Dlugos and De Marco and revised slightly by the PHR Department. The scale is 0 to 5, with explicit criteria for 5, 3, and 1. Professors submitted a unique rubric grade for each student who submitted an essay, and included the results for each course section and a brief description of the assignment. The Assessment Liaison checked the assignments for relevance and coordinated data collection, and performed the statistical analyses on the data set.

Develop an Assessment Strategy

Criterion for success:

The mean grade of student sample will be 3.5 or greater (scale = 0 to 5).

Dean's Comments:
VP's Comments:

Implement Assessment Plan & Strategy

Summary and analysis of data collected:

Data was collected from the Spring 2011 semester. Eleven sections of PHR-101, PHR-120, and PHR-121 were used as a sample (PHR-101-XXX, PHR-101-XXX, PHR-101-003, PHR-101-098WB, PHR-101-097WBH, PHR-101-099WB, PHR-120-099WB, PHR-120-XXX, PHR-121-XXXH, PHR-121-098WB, PHR-121-099WB). Six sections of PHR-101, two sections of PHR-120, three sections of PHR-121. This set included two Honors sections, and six web based/internet/distance learning sections. All sections were taught by full time professors (four tenured or tenure-track, one lecturer). 238 total students submitted (n = 238) essays. Mean = 3.598739; median = 4; population standard deviation = 1.318787; population variance = 1.7392. These statistics were obtained from the raw data set (a unique rubric number grade for each of the 238 students). The criterion of success was achieved. (Raw data, assignment descriptions, et cetera available by request.)

N.B. The Assessment Liaison thanks the PHR Department for their participation, sound advice, and pragmatism. In addition, thank you to the professors who submitted data.

(The Summary should appear here. Use attachments only to provide information to support the summary.)

Reporting and Revising

Use of results:

The PHR Department will discuss results during the Fall 2011 semester PHR Department meetings.

[added at end of Fall 2011 semester] During the Fall 2011 semester, the PHR Department discussed the results and nature of the assessment project at several PHR Department meetings. Although the results exceeded our criterion of success, the members of the PHR Department had concerns about student learning with respect to the understanding of philosophical and religious primary texts (and thereby theories, arguments, history of ideas, and concepts). There was general agreement that fundamental understanding of the most significant texts in the history of philosophy and religion was one of the primary goals of PHR Department pedagogy (the other being analytical and logical skills) and student learning. Participating in this assessment project confirmed that view, and the PHR Departmental policy that PHR course (with a few exceptions, e.g., basic logic courses) syllabi focus on and use primary texts in the relevant subject area (this includes historical and contemporary primary texts).

Perhaps most importantly, this assessment project gave rise to discussion on student exposition and understanding of primary texts, and caused many members of

the PHR Department to change the nature of, and emphasis on, some of their assignments. A few PHR Department members made these changes to their courses in the Fall 2011 semester. There was agreement on the need to emphasize the assessment of student understanding of basic theories, arguments, and concepts as derived from primary texts. One example of such a change is to move away from writing assignments (essays) that expect many learning goals to be assessed. Instead of requiring (say) essays in which students are expected to give both expositions and analysis/evaluation, more future assignments may just focus on exposition and understanding. Consequently, it may be desirable to dedicate a future assessment project to these kinds of assignments and emphasis changes (i.e., like those made during the Fall 2011 semester) in order to determine whether student learning is enhanced with respect to the exposition and understanding of philosophical and religious primary texts.

Essay Grading Rubric – PHR Department – Assessment Report – 2010-2012

Issue Selection, Organization, and Development (the main thesis and its development)	**Philosophical/Religious Content** (grasp of the philosophical ideas at issue)	**Argumentation** (rational support for the thesis)	**Writing** (includes tone, sentence flow, word choice, phrasing, adherence to conventions of grammar, punctuation, paragraph structure, etc.)
5. Issues are clearly stated and deeply explored; thoughts are clear and focused. Trivia and irrelevancies aren't found. Paragraphs flow logically.	**5.** The writer has a very clear and accurate understanding of the ideas or arguments being discussed. Essential details are included and correctly placed.	**5.** Thoughts are clearly and powerfully defended. Alternative positions and counterarguments are considered and rebutted. Weak or unsound reasoning is not used, and rhetoric is not used in place of argument.	**5.** The writing is lively, expressive, and engaging. Word choice is precise and rich. Sentences flow nicely. There are no errors in grammar, punctuation, or spelling.
3. Issues are explored somewhat superficially, and ideas tend to be general or mundane. The organization and flow of paragraphs is adequate.	**3.** The writer has a good understanding of the ideas or arguments being discussed, but there are some factual errors or misconceptions present. Important details may be left out or misplaced.	**3.** Thoughts are supported, but support is incomplete or not compelling/cogent. Counterarguments and alternative points of view are not seriously considered. Rhetoric is sometimes substituted for argument.	**3.** The writing is pleasant, acceptable, and mostly mechanically correct, but there may still be typos, spelling errors, or awkward constructions that interfere with reading and/or comprehension.
1. The essay lacks coherence; either it is difficult to discern what the writer wants to say or accomplish, or the writer moves significantly off of the original topic or thesis as the essay progresses.	**1.** The writer has a very poor or superficial understanding of the ideas or arguments being discussed. Many factual errors or misconceptions are present. Key concepts or details are missing.	**1.** Thoughts are weakly supported, if at all. Fallacies and rhetoric may be prominent. Lines of reasoning, if any, are weak, or difficult to comprehend or paraphrase. There may be big gaps that the reader must fill in with guesswork.	**1.** Sentences are choppy, incomplete, rambling, or awkward, or there may be many spelling typos or errors. Ideas are difficult to comprehend without rereading. The essay resists being read aloud.