Greetings colleagues,

This semester, fall 2014, the philosophy department will be conducting an assessment of our PHL 101: Issues in Philosophy course. The purpose of the assessment is to determine whether our students are able to demonstrate competence in the knowledge areas specific to PHL 101 as well as in critical thinking/reasoning, in accordance with the SUNY General Education Requirement Student Learning Outcomes.

The assessment tool has been developed by PHL 101 Ged Ed Assessment Team (of which I am the chairperson), and is to be administered in each section of PHL 101 at the end of the fall 2014 semester.

The format of the assessment tool is as follows: ten (10) questions, four (4) true/false questions concerning Epistemology, four (4) true/false questions concerning Metaphysics, and two (2) multiple choice questions concerning Critical Thinking.

In order to make the scoring process of the assessment as efficient as possible, the true/false and multiple choice format must be adhered to. However, the content of the questions concerning Epistemology and Metaphysics are to be devised by each instructor according to a general rubric. The committee agreed that, due to the wide variety in teaching styles and broad scope of course content used among our faculty when teaching PHL 101, the most effective way of assessing student performance would be for each instructor to devise questions that are consistent with the course material covered in their own classes according to their individual course outlines. Therefore, each instructor is to devise the eight true/false questions that deal with the PHL 101 Knowledge Area (four for Epistemology, four for Metaphysics) according to his/her own manner of teaching PHL 101.

Since the Critical Thinking component of PHL 101 is the same across all Gen Ed courses, the two Critical Thinking questions (one dealing with critical evaluation of an argument and the other with creative argumentation) have been devised by the assessment committee and will be the same for all versions of the assessment tool. In other words, while the eight true/false questions concerning Epistemology and Metaphysics may vary from instructor to instructor, the two multiple choice Critical Thinking questions will be identical.

In order to ensure that the students have an appropriate degree of motivation when completing the assessment tool, while at the same time not compromising the instructor's academic freedom in regards to the grading of their students, the assessment committee has decided that the assessment tool should be delivered in class as an extra-credit assignment, and thus can only positively affect the student's grade. One possible method of scoring would be to assign 1/2 point of extra credit for each correct answer, for a maximum total of 5 extra credit points, but it is up to the instructor to determine the amount of extra credit given.
Once the students have completed the assessment tool, the instructors will then be required to enter their students results online using the TracDat program. I will be holding information sessions on how to use TracDat in the coming weeks, and will notify you of their dates and times so that you can attend and become familiar with the program.

The assessment will be scored in the following way:

For the PHL 101 Knowledge Area (Metaphysics and Epistemology), the student's performance will be scored as either exceeds expectations, meets expectations, approaches expectations, or fails to meet expectations. The result will be determined by the number of correct true/false answers given.

For the Critical Evaluation component of Critical Thinking, the student's performance will be scored as either exceeds expectations, meets expectations, approaches expectations, or fails to meet expectations. The result will be determined by the answer selected.

For the Creative Reasoning component of Critical Thinking, the student's performance will be scored as either exceeds expectations, meets expectations, approaches expectations, or fails to meet expectations. The result will be determined by the answer selected.

Attached to this email are two documents. One is the PHL 101 Gen Ed Assessment Tool Rubric, which gives the general instructions to be followed in devising the assessment tool you'll devise for your own students. The second document is a sample assessment tool, which should be a helpful model when formulating your own assessment tool.

If you have any questions about this process, please don't hesitate to email me and let me know what needs further clarification. Please be assured of my deepest gratitude to each of you for your cooperation in this undertaking.

Sincerely,
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