

General Education Philosophical Reflections Student Learning Outcome Assessment

Submitted by Jim Taylor, Department of Philosophy

In 2019-2020 academic year, the department of Philosophy assessed student learning in relation to the GE Philosophical reflections SLO. The SLO reads, SLO: *“Students will be able to articulate major philosophical ideas and describe their bearing on the Christian liberal arts.”*

Jim Taylor was in charge, but all three faculty members (Nelson, Taylor, & Vander Laan) were involved.

David Vander Laan and Mark Nelson used different assessment methods in their PHI 6 courses during the spring 2020 semester for the purpose of assessing their students’ learning relative to the Philosophical Reflections GELO. Jim Taylor didn’t teach a section of PHI 6 in the spring and therefore, did not collect the data.

David asked his students to respond to the following prompt: “Consider your major or, if you have not chosen a major, a discipline that you are considering as a major. Describe in 3-4 sentences one way in which the metaphysical, epistemological, or ethical issues discussed in this class have affected the way you understand an issue in your discipline (or the discipline as a whole).”

Mark embedded his assessment questions in a course essay assignment (see Appendix A for details).

Here is the general prompt he used for this assignment (which includes the assessment questions):

“Write an essay of ca 3-4 pages (on **one** of the questions or topics listed in Appendix A). Make the best answer you can, but your answer must also include a discussion of the following two points:

a) Is this primarily an issue of metaphysics, epistemology or axiology (or some combination) of these?

b) How can other disciplines or majors studied at Westmont shed light on this problem? Explain.”

The collected student artifacts were evaluated by the rubric developed by the department and used for this assessment.

Philosophical Reflections Rubric

Category	Highly Developed	Developed	Emerging	Initial
reality	The student provides an interesting and sophisticated articulation of a metaphysical idea and an insightful articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a clear, specific, and accurate articulation of a metaphysical idea and a substantive articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a relatively vague articulation of a metaphysical idea and a relatively superficial articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student fails to articulate any metaphysical ideas or fails to describe the bearing of a metaphysical idea on the Christian liberal arts.
knowledge	The student provides an interesting and sophisticated articulation of an	The student provides a clear, specific, and accurate articulation of an epistemological	The student provides a relatively vague articulation of an epistemological idea	The student fails to articulate any epistemological ideas or fails to describe the

	epistemological idea and an insightful articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	idea and a substantive articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	and a relatively superficial articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	bearing of an epistemological idea on the Christian liberal arts.
value	The student provides an interesting and sophisticated articulation of an axiological idea and an insightful articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a clear, specific, and accurate articulation of an axiological idea and a substantive articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a relatively vague articulation of an axiological idea and a relatively superficial articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student fails to articulate any axiological ideas or fails to describe the bearing of an axiological idea on the Christian liberal arts.

David reported that **31** of **39** students responded, which constitutes 79%. Of these, **20** scored "highly developed," **7** scored "developed," and **4** or scored "emerging."

Mark reported that **39** of **39** (100%) students responded. Of these, **1** scored "highly developed," **11** scored "developed," **23** scored "emerging," and **4** scored "initial."

Combining these results yields the following: **HD: 30%, D: 25%, E: 39%, I: 6%**.

The established benchmark for this assessment was "At least 80% proficient." If "proficient" means "either highly developed or developed," then 55% (HD+D) result falls short. But David's and Mark's results are taken separately, David's class met the benchmark (at 87%) even though Mark's class did not (at 31%). The department is going to discuss this discrepancy in their upcoming conversations about the Philosophical Reflection area SLO assessment.

The department plans to discuss these activities during the 2020-2021 departmental meetings. Though David will be on sabbatical the entire year, Mark and Jim will continue to talk about what we can do to improve student learning in Philosophical Perspectives.

Appendix A.

**Mark Nelson's Spring 2020 Philosophical Perspectives Essay Prompt
for Philosophical Reflections GELO Assessment**

Part Two: Essay

Write an essay of ca 3-4 pages on **one** of the following questions or topics. Make the best answer you can, but your answer must also include a discussion of the following two points:

a) Is this primarily an issue of metaphysics, epistemology or axiology (or some combination) of these?

b) How can other disciplines or majors studied at Westmont shed light on this problem? Explain.

1. Read Mark Coppenger, "Vocation and World Hunger" (*Christian Scholars' Review*, 1983), and respond to the following: "Coppenger's article is a cop out. He clearly sees that Singer is right about our duties of famine relief, but he doesn't want to give up his money, so he hides behind the idea of 'Vocation'." Explain and critically assess this claim.

2. "Only a fool or a bigot would deny that ethics is relative. Only a fool could fail to see that different people live according to different ethical codes; and only a bigot could maintain that he or she is right and that everyone else is wrong." Discuss.

3. Read Nicole Cliffe, "How God Messed Up My Happy Atheist Life" (*Christianity Today*, May 2016), and respond to the following: "Cliffe's account of her own conversion to Christianity shows that philosophical thinking about religious belief is a waste of time." (Discuss with reference to at least two readings we have studied this semester.)

4. Read Chris Gabbard, "A Life Beyond Reason" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2010), and respond to the following: "Do Jeremy Bentham, Peter Singer or Immanuel Kant have anything to teach us about children like August? Do children like August have anything to teach us about the philosophies of Bentham, Singer or Kant?"