

Philosophy Department PLO #3: Virtues

“Students will demonstrate both enthusiasm for rational inquiry and awareness of the limits of rational inquiry.”

1. What we learned about our students’ learning

Mark Nelson assessed the Virtues outcome in the spring 2011 Senior Seminar by means of an essay question on the final exam. Dr. Nelson used a rubric to assess students’ answers with respect to charity, humility, carefulness, creativity, and fair-mindedness; he then used students’ scores on these criteria to assign an overall virtue score to each answer. He found that 25% of the students tested received an overall score of “excellent,” 37.5% an overall score of “good,” and 37.5% an overall score of “OK.” All students received an overall score of “OK” or better, which is to say that none received a “needs work” or “poor” or “failure” score.

Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Grade	E	E	G	G	G	O	O	O

- E = Excellent
- G = Good
- O = OK
- N = Needs work
- P = Poor
- F = Failure

Dr. Nelson observed that this result is good but leaves room for improvement given that Senior Seminar is an upper-level class. Since this assessment was carried out at the end of the spring 2011 semester, the department discussed these results early in the fall 2011 semester.

2. Changes we have made and plan to make to improve student learning

Since the results leave some appreciable room for improvement, the department is considering how students might be better prepared to exemplify the virtues being assessed. We are considering whether and how more explicit instruction in this area would be useful. And we continue to seek opportunities for faculty members to *model* the virtues the department hopes to see in students. Virtues are best gained by modeling and practice, and so we philosophy faculty are seeking to use occasions both inside and outside the classroom to be good examples for students as we engage them in the practice of thinking things through enthusiastically, humbly, thoughtfully, rigorously, with persistence, and from a Christian perspective.

Moreover, Jim Taylor recently received a course development grant from the Biola Center for Christian Thought for the purpose of creating a course entitled, "Intellectual Virtue and Civil Discourse." Prof. Taylor will teach this course for the first time in the fall of 2015. We hope this course will provide our department with an effective vehicle for student learning about and development of both intellectual and moral virtues.

3. Effectiveness of our current methods for assessing student achievement

Just as it has become clear to us that virtues are learned more by observation and imitation than by instruction and cognition, we are wondering whether virtue acquisition and cultivation are better assessed by watching students in action than by reading students' essays. So we are discussing the possibility that some of us might sometimes choose to assess student learning relative to our Virtues PLO by means of student presentations and student participation in philosophical conversations and debates. In his Intellectual Virtue and Civil Discourse class, Prof. Taylor will have students give presentations about famous people who manifest intellectual virtues and civil discourse. He will also have them engage in conversations with each other in which they will be expected to exhibit these qualities as well. But we have ongoing questions about how to assess student growth in intellectual virtue and how to provide evidence of this growth. We will formulate and discuss a rubric for this purpose in the near future.

4. Potential changes to our assessment work

Changes to our assessment work in this area are currently focused on more deliberate faculty modeling of the virtues (#2 above) and the possibility of more observational assessment of student development and demonstration of the virtues (#3 above) – at least in some classes by some professors.