

# Bergen Community College

---

## ASSESSMENT REPORT FORM FOR ACADEMIC OPTION

**Assessment Period:** Fall 2014 – Spring 2016

**Department/Program:** Philosophy and Religion: Philosophy Option

**Department Chair:** Peter Dlugos

**Department Assessment Liaison:** Toby De Marco

**Date Submitted:** May 31, 2016

**Option Description or mission/goal statement of the Department/Program:**

[Source: internal PHR documents, BCC PHR Department Brochure, BCC PHR web site]

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.]).

The Bergen Community College Department of 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 option 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 Option 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.

---

## **SEMESTER 1: CREATING PROGRAM/OPTION-LEVEL ASSESSMENT PLAN**

**Semester 1 = Fall 2014.**

### **1. Program/Option Learning Goal(s) or Outcome(s) to be assessed (from the above section):**

Philosophy Option Goal # 1: Students will identify and analyze the basic problems of philosophy in the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory.

### **2. Means of Assessment:**

Forty (40) ungraded (not evaluated) essays/papers will be selected by a random method from seven (7) sections of PHR-101, PHR-106, PHR-107, PHR-110, during the Spring 2015 semester (includes regular, hybrid, and online sections). Each professor will assign an essay that requires exposition of a basic problem in philosophy. The essay assignment/topic sheets will be collected by the assessment liaison,

and excerpts will be appended to the assessment report. Each professor will submit all of the submitted student essays to the assessment liaison by the end of March 2015. The assessment liaison will use a random method to select a representative sample of forty (40) essays. The representativeness of the sample will be based upon the option (philosophy or religion), course, number of sections of the course, and professor. A collectively constructed rubric will be used for the holistic grading. In April 2015, a group of no less than three professors will evaluate each of the forty essays according to the agreed upon rubric. The rubric is appended to this assessment report as Appendix A.

- **Feedback from Dean:** On the one hand, I like that the assessment will draw from five different sections. However, it's not completely clear how the philosophical problems students will be identifying and analyzing relate. Are they of equal difficulty?

**Comment:** It does not matter to the purpose of this assessment project how the philosophical problems relate. All essay assignments were of roughly equal difficulty.

## **SEMESTER 2: DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT TOOL (s) and TIMELINE**

### **Semester 2 = Spring 2015.**

#### **3A. Describe or attach assessment tool (s), including sources of data, timeline for data collection and how data will be analyzed.**

Sources of data: a representative sample (see above) of forty (40) essays collected from sections of PHR-101, PHR-106, PHR-107, PHR-110 taught by professors during the Spring 2015 semester.

Professors will assign essays to students in the relevant course sections between January and March of 2015. Professors will submit essays from relevant courses to the assessment liaison by the end of March 2015. Essays will be selected by a random method.

Holistic grading by rubric will be used by Philosophy and Religion professors in April 2015.

After essays are holistically graded, the assessment liaison will make a data spreadsheet of the raw essay scores (from rubric) for each essay. Averages, medians, population standard deviations, population variances, and modes will be calculated for each essay, and for the set of all forty (40) essays.

Holistic rubric attached as Appendix A.

#### **3B. Desired results faculty would like to see.**

The Philosophy and Religion Department desires that seventy-five percent (75 %) of the sample of essays evaluated will be an average of two (2) or above according to the rubric. A score of two is roughly equivalent to a C+/B- grade.

- **Feedback from CIE:**

## **SEMESTER 3: COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA**

**Semester 3 = Fall 2015.**

### **4. Summary of Results (attach aggregated data table, survey tool, etc., to support the summary)**

Thirty-eight (38) student essays were evaluated according to a rubric on two criteria: philosophical content (based on the student learning goal) and analysis. Five professors participated in the holistic grading process. Each professor submitted his/her evaluations to the PHR Assessment Liaison. The thirty-eight (38) essays were randomly selected to construct a representative sample. The representativeness was determined by the total number of courses from which essays were collected, the total number of course sections from which essays were collected, and the total number of sections and courses taught by a professor from which essays were collected. Please note that the representativeness of the sample did not reflect demographic properties (or other properties) of students. (The purpose of this project did not require such representativeness.)

The rubric contained three possible evaluative grades: 3, 2, 1 (see attached rubric). Each of the thirty-eight (38) essays was assigned by each professor two rubric grades: one for philosophical content and one for analysis. Our desired result was based upon philosophical content only.

The results were collected, compiled, and analyzed by the PHR Assessment Liaison. For each of the thirty-eight (38) essays, arithmetic means, population standard deviations, population variances, medians, and modes were obtained. The same statistical constructions were obtained for the entire data set. (Spreadsheet attached as Appendix B.) The relevant results are as follows.

Arithmetic mean of 38 evaluated essays = 2.17153

Median of means = 2.275

Mean of population standard deviations = .3355

63.16 % of sample had a mean of  $\geq 2$

Desired result was partially achieved.

Although 63.15 % of the sample essays had mean holistic evaluation of greater than or equal to 2, the overall mean and median did meet the PHR Department's desired result.

## 5. Recommendations for Improvement:

Align assignments with student learning outcomes/goals in master syllabi.

Include some form of library instruction when assignments require research.

### ▪ Feedback from Dean:

It appears that the department's desired outcome was met. The faculty evaluated 38 essays from five different course sections of Philosophy and Religion based on students' ability to identify and analyze basic problems of philosophy. The essays were assigned a 3, 2, or 1 grade (from strongest to weakest) and from the onset of the assessment project they hoped for at least 75% of the participating essays to earn at least a 2 grade. Of the 38 they evaluated the median grade was a 2.275.

This would lead the faculty to believe that at least three quarters of their students were able to do passable work in identifying and analyzing these problems at the close of the semester.

However, the sample size is a bit small. 38 student essays from five different sections representative of five different courses is only about seven or eight students from each. It seems unlikely that there were no more potential student essays in each section to draw from. I would recommend a continuation of this assessment study with a bigger pool of students and maybe all from the same course.

The faculty's finding on the consistency of their evaluation (amongst the participating faculty members) is very nice to hear of.

## SEMESTER 4: CLOSING THE LOOP AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

### 6. Use of Results:

During the Spring 2015 and Fall 2015 semesters the PHR Department had conversations during Department meetings about the results of the Philosophy Assessment project. One inference we draw from the compiled data and basic statistical analysis is that there is minute variability in evaluative judgments of student work by professors in the PHR Department. The evidence for this claim is that the mean population standard deviation was .5 with a mean population variance of .4. Members of the PHR Department think that this is good and expected. This confirms that what counts as good, quality work in philosophy courses is stable. Whether one wants to label that evidence for objectivity or inter-subjective agreement in grading/evaluating is beyond the scope of this assessment report. Nonetheless, one may interpret this evaluative stability as providing a substantial reason for the assessment project's reliability and validity with respect to the holistic grading method (of course this does not substantiate any other kind of external validity/reliability).

Results were analyzed and discussed during PHR Department meetings during the Fall 2015 semester. The results emphasized our goal to have professors' assignments (examinations/tests, essays, projects, and presentations) directly connected to a course master syllabus student learning goal, which are, in turn, connected to Philosophy Option goals. The assessment project reaffirmed our commitment to this practice. In addition, this assessment project caused Philosophy professors to alter some of their current assignments to be better aligned with student learning goals/outcomes. In addition, Philosophy professors will include some form of library instruction when assignments require research.

**Comment on Dean's Comments:** The initial sample size was given by the CIE Assessment Fellow (n =40); however, a sample size of thirty-eight (38) was optimal given the suggestion of forty and the representativeness we were seeking in the sample. Standard methods for determining sample size (power sampling, margin of error, p-value related) are not applicable here because, *inter alia*, there is neither an intervention nor hypothesis, nor a sensible way of determining total population.

- **Feedback from CIE:**

Appendix A

	<b>** PHILOSOPHICAL CONTENT **</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Writing</b>
<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>3.</b> The writer has a very clear and accurate understanding of the ideas or arguments being discussed. The problem is clearly stated, and essential details are included and correctly placed.	<b>3.</b> The writer presents and synthesizes textual and other evidence in a way that reveals essential similarities and differences between traditions. The resulting analysis is insightful.	<b>3.</b> The writing is lively, expressive, and engaging. Sentences flow nicely. There are few or no errors in grammar, punctuation, or spelling.
<b>Good</b>	<b>2.</b> The writer has a good understanding of the ideas or arguments being discussed, but there are some factual errors or misconceptions present, or there is too heavy a reliance on secondary source interpretation. Important details may be left out or misplaced.	<b>2.</b> The writer includes and sorts textual and other evidence in a way that reveals some of the important similarities and differences between traditions, but the analysis is not complete, or not fully accurate.	<b>2.</b> 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.
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>1.</b> 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.	<b>1.</b> The writer lists some elements of each tradition, but few or no comparisons or contrasts are made. Little analysis of any sort is done. There may be big gaps that the reader must fill in with guesswork.	<b>1.</b> Sentences are choppy, incomplete, rambling, or awkward, or there may be many spelling typos or errors. Ideas are difficult to comprehend without rereading. Sentences jump from one idea to the next. The essay resists being read aloud.

Appendix B

2015 ap phil assess holistic grade grid results

Content	Prof 1	Prof 2	Prof 3	Prof 4	Prof 5	AVG	Stdevp	Median	Mode	Varp	Analysis	Prof 1	Prof 2	Prof 3	Prof 4	Prof 5	AVG	Stdevp	Median	Mode	
A 1	3	2.5	3	3	3	2.9	0.2	3	3	0.04		2	2	2	2	3	2.2	0.4	2	2	
A 2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0		2	1	1	1	1	1.2	0.4	1	1	
A 3	2	2	2.5	3	2	2.3	0.4	2	2	0.16		2	2	2	1	2	1.8	0.4	2	2	
A 4	3	3	2.5	2	2	2.5	0.447214	2.5	3	0.2		2	2.5	2	2	2	2.1	0.2	2	2	
A 5	3	2.5	2.5	3	3	2.8	0.244949	3	3	0.06		3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	
A 6	3	2.5	2.5	2	2	2.4	0.374198	2.5	2.5	0.14		3	3	3	2	3	2.8	0.4	3	3	
A 7	3	3	3	3	3	2.8	0.4	3	3	0.16		2	3	3	3	2	2.8	0.489898	3	3	
A 8	2	2	2	2	1	1.8	0.4	2	2	0.16		1	1.8	1	1	1	1.1	0.2	1	1	
A 9	1	1.5	1.5	2	2	1.8	0.374198	1.5	1.5	0.14		1	1.5	1	1	2	1.3	0.4	1	1	
A 10	3	2.5	3	3	3	2.9	0.2	3	3	0.04		3	2.5	2.5	2	3	2.8	0.374198	2.5	3	
A 11	2	1	1	1	1	1.2	0.4	1	1	0.16		1	1.5	1.5	2	1	1.4	0.374198	1.5	1	
A 12	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0		1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	
A 13	2	2	2.5	3	3	2.5	0.447214	2.5	2	0.2		2	2	2	3	2	2.2	0.4	2	2	
A 14	2	1.5	1.5	2	1	1.6	0.374198	1.5	2	0.14		2	1.5	1.5	2	2	1.8	0.344949	2	2	
A 15	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	0		2	1.5	1.5	2	2	1.8	0.374198	1.5	2	
A 16	2	2	2	2	3	2.2	0.4	2	2	0.16		2	2	2	2	3	2.2	0.4	2	2	
A 17	3	2.5	2	2	2	2.3	0.4	2	2	0.16		2	2	2	1	2	1.8	0.4	2	2	
A 18	1	1.5	1	1	1	1.1	0.2	1	1	0.04		1	1.5	1	1	1	1.1	0.2	1	1	
A 19	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	0		2	2	2	1	2	1.8	0.4	2	2	
A 20	2	3	3	3	3	2.8	0.489898	3	3	0.24		3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	
B 1	2	2	2		1	1.75	0.433013	2	2	0.1875		1	2	2		1	1.5	0.5	1.5	1	
B 2	2	2	2		1	1.75	0.433013	2	2	0.1875		3	2	2.5		1	2.125	0.73661	2.25	None	
B 3	2	2	2		1	1.75	0.433013	2	2	0.1875		2	2	2		1	1.75	0.433013	2	2	
B 4	3	3	3		2	2.75	0.433013	3	3	0.1875		3	3	3		2	2.75	0.433013	3	3	
B 5	3	3	3		2	2.75	0.433013	3	3	0.1875		3	3	3		3	3	0	3	3	
B 6	3	2.5	2.5		3	2.75	0.25	2.75	3	0.0625		3	2.5	2.5		3	2.75	0.25	2.75	3	
B 7	2	2	2		2	2	0	2	2	0		3	1.5	2		1	1.875	0.73661	1.75	None	
B 8	3	2	2		2	2.25	0.433013	2	2	0.1875		3	1	1.5		2	1.875	0.73661	1.75	None	
B 9	2	1	1.5		1	1.375	0.414678	1.25	1	0.171875		2	1	1.5		1	1.375	0.414678	1.25	1	
B 10	2	3	3		3	2.75	0.433013	3	3	0.1875		3	2	2		2	2.25	0.433013	2	2	
B 11	2	2	2		1	1.75	0.433013	2	2	0.1875		2	2	2		1	1.75	0.433013	2	2	
B 12	2	2.5	2		1	1.875	0.544950	2	2	0.2990125		1	2	1.5		2	1.875	0.414678	1.75	2	
B 13	1	3	2		1	1.75	0.829156	1.5	1	0.6875		2	3	2.5		2	2.375	0.414678	2.25	2	
B 14	2	3	2.5		3	2.625	0.414678	2.75	3	0.171875		3	3	3		2	2.75	0.433013	3	3	
B 15	3	3	3		3	3	0	3	3	0		3	3	3		3	3	0	3	3	
B 16	3	3	3		2	2.75	0.433013	3	3	0.1875		3	2	2.5		2	2.375	0.414678	2.25	2	
B 17	2.5	2.5	2.5		3	2.625	0.218606	2.5	2.5	0.0469025		2	2.5	2.5		2	2.25	0.25	2.25	2	
B 18	3	3	3		2	2.75	0.433013	3	3	0.1875		3	3	3		2	2.75	0.433013	3	3	
AVG		2.25	2.25	2.229894	2.1	1.947395	2.171863	0.339598	2.217106	2.229894	0.145096					2	2.75				
Stdevp		0.895302	0.636086	0.625104	0.7	0.792974	0.579629														
Varp		0.444079	0.404906	0.390795	0.49	0.629809	0.335002														
Median		2	2.25	2	2	2	2.75														
Mode		2	2	2	2	2	2.75														



## Assignment Sheet – Problems Essay, What is the best life to live?

---

This assignment assesses your progress on our second course objective: identify and analyze the basic problems of philosophy in the fields of metaphysics, axiology, and epistemology.

This assignment is about the problem or question of how life is best lived. This question has been in the background of our discussion of the Wisdom tradition in philosophy. In an essay of 4-5 pages, and in your own words, you are to (1) state and explain what is meant by the Wisdom tradition *and* how it relates to the question of how life is best lived, and (2) present two major answers to this question as found in Plato (Socrates) and Augustine. As you discuss their two accounts of how life is best lived, you should aim to note points of comparison, overlap, as well as points of contrast.

While you are free to ultimately defend one account over the other, you are not required to do so.

This essay is not meant to be a research project. Readings in the text, class lecture, and discussions should be sufficient. However, you may consult other secondary sources if you wish. If you do consult secondary sources, it is imperative that you express what you wish to say using your own thoughts, ideas, and language. Direct quotations should be used sparingly, if at all. If you choose to paraphrase or restate another writer's ideas, arguments, or words, avoid close paraphrases, and you must include a citation of the work in the text of your essay, at the appropriate place, and then give bibliographic details at the end of your essay.

Essay should be double spaced, in a 10 to 12 point font, with no more than one inch margins.

Post questions to the I Need Help forum in Moodle, or ask in class.

---

## Assignment Sheet – Problems Essay, Writing Assignment

---

Even though it is early in the semester, this assignment assesses your progress on our first two course learning objectives: identify the basic problems of moral philosophy and the major figures in the history of moral philosophy, and critically analyze the basic issues in moral philosophy;

This assignment is about the problem of religion and morality, that is, the relationship between religion and morality.

In an essay of 4-5 pages, *and in your own words*, you are to (1) state and explain this problem, and (2) present and discuss at least two major positions on the relationship of religion and morality. As you write and describe these positions, you should aim to note points of comparison and points of contrast. While you are free to ultimately defend one position or response over the other, you are not required to do so; however, your essay should give a sense of their respective strengths and weaknesses.

This essay is not meant to be a research project. Readings in the text, class lecture, and discussions should be sufficient. However, *if you do consult secondary sources, it is imperative that you express what you wish to say using your own thoughts, ideas, and language*. Direct quotations should be used sparingly, if at all. If you choose to paraphrase or restate another writer's ideas, arguments, or words, avoid close paraphrases, and you must include a citation of the work in the text of your essay, at the appropriate place, and then give bibliographic details at the end of your essay.

Essay should be double spaced, in a 10 to 12 point font, with no more than one inch margins.

Post questions to the I Need Help forum in Moodle, or ask in class.

---

Write a concise, precise, economical, yet adequate essay on **one** of the following topics/questions. One must answer all of the questions within a topic. Treat this essay assignment as if it were a take-home essay examination, *not* a research paper. Please follow the guidelines given in the syllabus, hand-outs, and in class. Use the Writing Packet distributed in class. Use the resources at the college, such as the Writing Center (see the syllabus for more resources at BCC). Come to office hours for help with writing, outline, proofreading, et cetera. If one wants, submit a draft to me BEFORE the due date.

1. How does David Hume justify the claim that aesthetic judgments are neither true nor false, yet some judgments are better than others? Give a detailed exposition of Hume's position.

2. Is there really a distinction between liking (having a preference for) a work of art (from any art form) and making an aesthetic judgment about a work of art? How do Hume and Kant address or not address this distinction and problem?

Jean-Paul Sartre and Galen Strawson present opposing answers to the questions, “Do human beings have true free will?” and “Are human beings responsible for the choices they make?” In this 800-1000 word paper, you will

- explain the “problem” of free will, then
- present, interpret, and contrast Sartre and Strawson’s ideas, as well as
- explain your own position, which involves your evaluation of their ideas.

Your presentation of the philosophers’ ideas must be well grounded in their texts, which you should summarize in your own words, providing page and paragraph references to back up your summaries. Use direct quotations sparingly.

You can undertake this assignment as an *essay* or as a *dialogue*. If *essay*, you will include all the elements listed below, and also craft an appropriate introduction, conclusion, and transitions between paragraphs. If *dialogue*, you will include all the elements listed below, presented in a short play which includes Sartre, Strawson, and you (a minimum) as characters. Without obsessing over the details of time travel, set the scene where you and the philosophers meet to talk. You still must provide references to the text to support the words you put into the philosophers’ mouths. Format your dialogue as shown at the bottom of the instructions.

### Instructions/Elements

- 1) **Briefly explain why philosophers have considered free will a “problem.”** For help, use the handouts from Strawson and/or Doyle, and/or Section 1 from the “Free Will” entry of the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/freewill/>). You may use other sources as well, but make sure you CITE every source you use, and if it is NOT a text from the course (Sartre, Strawson, or Doyle), you must also list that source on a Works Cited page. *If you don’t cite or list your sources, you have crossed the line into plagiarism and your paper will be evaluated accordingly.*
- 2) Go back to the texts of Sartre and Strawson and **summarize (with explanation) the main reasons each philosopher offers to support his positions on the two questions above.**
- 3) Organize the philosophers’ answers for each question into the format of **position, challenge, response**. Start with a different philosopher for each question. Example:
  - **Position:** Why does **Sartre** think human beings DO have free will?
  - **Challenge:** What is the PROBLEM with the way Sartre is thinking, as Strawson would see it? Why would **Strawson** say that Sartre is wrong?
  - **Response:** What could **Sartre** say to defend his original position? How could he respond to Strawson’s challenge?

Then you would address the question of responsibility, starting with **Strawson’s** position, then **Sartre’s** challenge, then **Strawson’s** response.

- 4) **Explain your position.** Why do you agree with Sartre, Strawson or neither? Present your own view on free will and responsibility, and back it up with a reason or example of your own (not simply what Sartre and Strawson have already said). Make sure that you ADDRESS (not ignore) the points the philosophers have already made, especially the “determinism” factor.