

**Philosophy Program**  
**California State University, Stanislaus**  
**Assessment Report**  
**Andy Young, PAC**  
**2007-2008**

**Mission statement**

Revised, fall 2007. Revisions included in 06-07 Assessment Report.

**Program goals**

Revised, fall 2007. Revisions included in 06-07 Assessment Report.

**Student learning goals**

Unchanged. Current goals included in 06-07 Assessment Report.

**Curriculum map**

Unchanged. Current map included in 06-07 Assessment Report appendices.

**Assessment activities 07-08**

- The Department revised its mission statement, reviewed Spring 07 data, gathered Fall 07 data, reviewed Fall 07 data, gathered Spring 08 data.
- PAC wrote 06-07 report, consulted with Faculty Coordinator for ASL, attended PAC meetings and February PAC conference at CSUS, organized Department meetings, and conducted the Fall 07 and Spring 08 assessments.

**What data was collected, and how?**

A) Fall 2007: *continued assessment of goal 1, objective 3 (Philosophical Writing)*

1) Process

- a) We revised our department writing rubric to give us clearer and more detailed information about student writing.
- b) All majors were assessed in all major courses at the end of Fall 07 by applying the rubric to their final course papers.

2) Results

- a) Results were reviewed by the Department in the Spring of 08.
- b) The new, more sensitive, rubric revealed that majors are doing well with their writing in all eight categories.

3) Conclusion

- a) Majors are demonstrating more than acceptable levels of competence across all eight dimensions of the rubric, so no changes in the curriculum are needed at this time regarding this objective.

4) Future

- a) Our original intention was to regularly use this rubric to document measurable improvement in student writing over time. However, given the positive results, the Department felt that less frequent use of the rubric would be appropriate. We will focus our assessment energies on other SLO's.

B) Spring 2008: *gathering summary data from IDEA to support current APR.*

1) Process

- a) We purchased summary IDEA reports for five different configurations of philosophy classes (see attached table) in order to gather information for our current APR.
- b) Our goal was to find out what students think about the quality of our courses, and about the quality of their learning in our courses, and to see if this revealed any problems.
- c) The PAC met with the PAC coordinator and others to arrange for the collection of the information during the summer of 08.
- d) The information that we thought would be useful were the four IDEA quality measures (overall progress on learning objectives, teacher, course, and summary) along with six learning goals that are relevant to the department.
- e) To see how well we're doing we compared ourselves to three norms as reported by IDEA.
  - (a) National comparison (based on IDEA's national data set of raw scores). This comparison reveals something about how our courses compare to other courses in all disciplines across the nation.
  - (b) CSUS comparison (based on adjusted scores). This comparison tells us something about how our courses compare to other courses at CSUS. CSUS courses rate higher than the IDEA's national norms.
  - (c) CSUS group averages (based on adjusted scores). This comparison was used to confirm and clarify the previous comparison with other CSUS courses.

2) Results

- a) Quality
  - (1) IDEA divides quality ratings into five categories, with the upper 30% (Much Higher and Higher) representing superior teaching. IDEA says "To the degree that the percentages of the Group's classes in the two highest categories (of qualitative measures) **exceeds** 30% . . . , teaching effectiveness appears to be superior to that in the comparison group." (IDEA summary data reports, Summer, 2008).
  - (2) The following table summarizes our results across all configurations of classes (S = superior teaching effectiveness, M = matches comparison group for teaching effectiveness). The attached table contains specific numbers.

Comparison Group	Quality measure	Our ranking
National	A: Progress on Relevant Objectives	S
	B: Excellence of Teacher	S
	C: Excellence of Course	S
	D: Summary Evaluation	S
CSUS (percentage)	A: Progress on Relevant Objectives	S
	B: Excellence of Teacher	S
	C: Excellence of Course	M

	D: Summary Evaluation	S
CSUS (average)	A: Progress on Relevant Objectives	S
	B: Excellence of Teacher	S
	C: Excellence of Course	S
	D: Summary Evaluation	S

b) Learning Objectives

- (1) The Department chose to assess six IDEA learning objectives. These are the objectives most frequently listed as either Important, or Essential by our instructors (specific percentage of instructors choosing these are in the attached table).
- (2) The Department chose to compare itself to CSUS adjusted averages (these are consistently higher than the IDEA adjusted averages).
- (3) Results
  - (a) The following table summarizes our results across all configurations of classes (A = above CSUS norms; M = matches CSUS norms). More detail is available in the attached table.

Objective	Comparison
2: Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories.	A
3: Learning to apply course material (to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions).	A
8: Developing skill in expressing myself orally or in writing.	A/M
10: Developing a clearer understanding of and commitment to personal values	A
11: Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.	A
12: Acquiring an interest in learning more by asking my own questions and seeking answers.	A

3) Conclusions

a) Quality

- (1) The IDEA results indicate that students uniformly rate Philosophy courses as having superior teaching excellence.
- (2) While the excellence of course ratings match the comparison group, excellence of course for major classes rates higher.
- (3) Majors, as might be expected, rate their learning experiences very highly in all quality categories.
- (4) The overall ratings for “Lower-division” classes are slightly lower than the others, but still well above, or matching, CSUS norms.

b) Learning objectives

- (1) Students rate their learning in our classes very highly.
- (2) Again, the highest ratings are from major classes, and the lowest ratings are from “Lower-division” classes.

- (3) Lower-division classes, nonetheless, rank significantly higher in terms of attaining learning objectives than other CSUS classes, except in the category of oral and written expression where we match CSUS norms.
  - (4) Of our six selected IDEA objectives we rate extremely well in #11 (critical thinking) (this is also an objective that is chosen nearly 100% of the time as either “Important or Essential” to our instruction). Our lowest ratings, still above CSUS norms, except for “Lower-division” courses, are on Objective #8 (oral and written expression)
- 4) Recommendations
- a) Quality
    - (1) Maintain current high levels of teaching excellence.
    - (2) In the future, it might be interesting to study student responses to the “Excellent Courses” question to see if we can understand why this is not rated as highly as teacher excellence and learning objectives. However, when we look at the upper 70% of courses at CSUS, our courses come out well above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile, so we don’t believe pursuing this in detail will provide much significant information about how to improve our courses. This is confirmed by the fact that across the board our courses “Summary Evaluation” rates are well above the norm for CSUS. In addition, trying to understand the causes for such a rating (which is still quite good) would be enormously complicated, and not a wise use of our resources, resources that we believe will be better spent continuing to assess Department learning objectives.
    - (3) It might also be interesting to study why “Lower-division” courses are rated slightly lower than other cohorts of classes. But again, the number of possible explanations is enormous, and not all of them have to do with instruction. Sorting through these variables doesn’t seem like a wise use of our time, given the fact that the overall excellence of the courses is still well above CSUS norms. Also, lower-division courses (G.E.) fall outside the PAC assessment mandate.
  - b) Learning objectives
    - (1) Maintain current high standards of teaching excellence.
    - (2) As time permits, it might be interesting to investigate the causes for the lower ratings of the “Lower-division” courses, and of Objective #8. Once again though, ferreting out the actual causes, in order to make an informed decision about what to do, would be enormously complex and time-consuming, and the payoff would be small (since we are still well above CSUS norms for both). Again, we believe our assessment energies will be more productively spent in assessing Department learning objectives.
- 5) Future
- a) Philosophy is one of only two departments on campus to explore this use of IDEA summary data
  - b) Many factors affect the quality of IDEA data, such as number of sets per faculty member, distribution of teaching assignments, distribution of full-time and part-time assignments, traditional enrollment patterns, GE requirements, student preparation, and many more. As such, we believe IDEA data can give

a rough idea of teaching excellence, and may be able to point out areas in the curriculum that need investigation, but shouldn't be used to try to make fine distinctions that the data simply isn't designed to give, and for which appropriate variable controls are not in place.

- c) If funding allows, the Department might redo this IDEA summary before our next APR.

### **Recommendations**

- Given that both assessment activities confirm excellent instruction across the board, the Department sees no need to question its general teaching approach.

### **Appendices**

- IDEA Summary Evaluation table.

