

CHAPTER 9: UNDERGRADUATE DISCIPLINE ASSESSMENT SPOTLIGHT

Each year the Assessment Almanac highlights the assessment methods of one department at Truman. This year's issue will feature the Philosophy and Religion Department. The Department is currently in the midst of a major change in the way their senior tests assessment is conducted. We will discuss the changes the department is going to institute from this academic year and highlight the various other assessment methods used.

The Philosophy and Religion Department used to rely on the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) to measure student learning outcomes at the end of their senior year. However, the CLA was not a useful test to measure actual outcomes of the PHRE program. The main goals of the PHRE program are to give students a broad understanding of histories and practices of philosophies and religions, familiarity with methodological questions, critical and empathic textual acuity, open mindedness and ethical sensitivity. Whereas, the CLA was more focused on solving real world problems, quantitative reasoning and how well students can critique an argument. In order to have a more appropriate and useful measure of student outcomes, the PHRE department has decided to use a formal evaluation of student performance in the senior seminar as their senior test.

The Senior Seminar is the capstone course for the PHRE major. It is conducted every academic year during the spring semester. Students are evaluated on their ability to conduct independent research consistent with the best practices in the discipline of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Program outcomes will be evaluated using the Thesis Director's grades for all their assignments and the assessment scores from multiple faculty members on the students' oral presentations and essays. The Senior Seminar is also integrated with the Truman portfolio. It is

expected that students will use their senior thesis for the critical thinking portion of the portfolio. The department plans to use the critical thinking rubric from the portfolio to evaluate student's work in earlier coursework from their major classes and then compare it with their performance in the Senior Seminar.

Other than the Senior Seminar, the PHRE department also has Program Outcome Evaluations. This is a form filled out by every professor who has had these students in their class. This assessment method allows for multiple viewpoints of a student and a more complete picture of the student's performance throughout their time at Truman.

The department does not find other measures of assessment as useful as the Senior Seminar process and Program Outcome Evaluations. Information collected from these two assessment methods has been helpful in evaluating the PHRE program and applying useful changes where necessary. For example, over the past two years the department has found that some seniors have trouble identifying the methodology they are using in their senior thesis. In keeping with the university wide effort to increase the critical thinking aspects of coursework, professors in the department have begun to increase their emphasis on discussions in class about methodologies to help students become more self-aware of the kind of work they are doing. It is hoped that more such useful information will be found by the new focus on the Senior Seminar process as the senior test and comparison with earlier coursework.