Illustration: Anticipated Modifications to Outcome and Performance Criteria

Explanatory Context:
Our previous two assessment exercises revealed that some outcomes as originally articulated (prior to any assessment) proved to be too narrowly defined for the range of actual skills and values associated with the philosophy major.

For this reason, in our current assessment exercise, we anticipate a similar need to revise the outcome under assessment. We have devised a new outcome and developed performance criteria in relation to it. This outcome will be the focus not only of a dedicated gateway course in our new curriculum (PHL 203: What is Philosophy?) but also of upper-level courses as they build upon initial mastery in an overhauled philosophy major.

During the current assessment exercise, we altered the course pedagogy, in-class exercises and testing structure to reflect these modifications.

Original Outcome and Criteria:
Outcome 2 in the URI Philosophy Major was originally stated in the following way:

Read a major philosophical text analytically and be able to write out critical evaluations of philosophical arguments

Performance Criteria in relation to this outcome were stated as follows:

Students are expected to continue to develop a strong basic understanding of skills necessary for a student to succeed as a philosophy major. Students will acquire and develop the skill of using principles of inductive and deductive reasoning to analyze a sustained line of thought in one or more canonical texts of Western philosophy. Students will move from generating accurate written exegeses of arguments in the text to interpreting and engaging the text critically in writing and in class discussion. Students will analyze, interpret and criticize an additional, specific idea or theory from a different philosophical context, present the analysis before the class and produce a short paper detailing the analysis.
New Outcome and Criteria: Outcome 2 and its attendant performance criteria are shown below. The main modification to the original outcome and criteria – the original overstressed argument analysis at the expense of other rhetorical strategies – is highlighted in yellow.

Outcome # 2: Read, interpret and analyze a major philosophical text paying attention to (1) conceptual analysis, (2) thematic development of concepts and (3) the significance of particular passages.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Falls Below Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate ability to identify and explain key concepts and arguments</td>
<td>Meets expectations and further places steps of an argument in proper context, showing and understanding of relationships among ideas</td>
<td>Selects relevant terms and ideas in response to questions and explains their functions accurately</td>
<td>Fails to select relevant terms and ideas in response to question and/or explains their functions inaccurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trace and explain the development of an idea, concept, or theme in a philosophical text</td>
<td>Meets expectations and shows a deep grasp of the text as well as a facility to construct a narrative that elegantly reveals conceptual themes within it</td>
<td>Shows familiarity with the text and constructs a coherent narrative featuring material selected from multiple points within that text</td>
<td>Shows little or no familiarity with the text and/or is unable to construct a coherent narrative featuring material selected from multiple points within that text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read and explicate a particular passage in depth and show how the passage articulates key concepts</td>
<td>Meets expectations and in addition through an especially sensitive reading of the passage throws new light upon the conceptual structure of the text</td>
<td>Explicates passage in light of key concepts and their development within the work</td>
<td>Does not adequately explain the passage and/or does not connect it to the conceptual structure of the text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Alterations in pedagogy: On the first essay exam, students did not perform as strongly on the highlighted criterion as they did on the other two. Therefore, changes in class pedagogy were developed to address this problem before the next exam. The attached quiz and grading rubric reflect deliberate attempts to teach toward the criterion highlighted. The lesson plan proceeded as follows.

- The quiz was given to students in class. (quiz attached)
- Once students had finished the quiz, they were placed into small groups of three.
- Each person in the group was given two copies of the grading rubric for the quiz. (rubric attached)
- Students read each other’s quizzes and marked them informally using the rubrics.
- Rubrics were used to guide discussions as students engaged in Peer-learning: they “workshopped” each other’s quizzes by suggesting strengths and areas for improvement.
- Following this, students returned to their individual seats and were given a clean rubric, which they used to assess their own quiz.
- Perceptive self-criticism could earn ½ to 1 extra point on the final quiz grade (which was graded on a scale of 0-4 before extra points)
- Students responded with enthusiasm to this in-class exercise and reported that they felt much more prepared to master the skill assessed when they next encountered it on an exam.
It appears, then, that this idea of necessary connexion among events arises from a number of similar instances, which occur, of the constant conjunction of these events; nor can the idea ever be suggested by any one of these instances, surveyed in all possible lights and positions. But …after a repetition of similar instances, the mind is carried by habit, upon the appearance of one event, to expect its usual attendant, and to believe that it will exist. This connexion, therefore, which we feel in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression, from which we form the idea of power or necessary connexion. Nothing farther is the case. Contemplate the subject on all sides; you will never find any other origin of that idea.

Section 7-2 (para. 2)
It appears, then, that this idea of necessary connexion among events arises from a number of similar instances, which occur, of the constant conjunction of these events; nor can the idea ever be suggested by any one of these instances, surveyed in all possible lights and positions. But …after a repetition of similar instances, the mind is carried by habit, upon the appearance of one event, to expect its usual attendant, and to believe that it will exist. This connexion, therefore, which we feel in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression, from which we form the idea of power or necessary connexion. Nothing farther is the case. Contemplate the subject on all sides; you will never find any other origin of that idea.

Section 7-2 (para. 28)