

**Core Assessment Matrix (CAM)  
TEMPLATE**

**UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO**  
**Core Area: Philosophy**  
**Spring 2007**

<b>(1) Student Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>(2) Measurement of Evidence</b>	<b>(3) Summary Results</b>	<b>(4) Assessment Informed Improvements</b>
Understand the value of thinking philosophically by reflecting on the meaning of one's own life, the conceptual foundations of human actions and beliefs, the nature of the self and of human responsibility.	- Students write 5 Weekly Reading Commentaries (posted to Blackboard, with peer-responses) and then turn to their 3 Essays, all of which investigate the philosophical core of the reading, their reaction, and the relation of the reading to their everyday life.	- 80% of students fulfilled the requirement of 5 Weekly Commentaries of 500 or more words along with 10 250-word Responses. - Nearly 50% of the students consistently exceeded both the word minimum and the instructor's expectation of their mature grasp of the material	- With a clear expectation regarding the content of the Weekly Commentaries, students were able to deliver keen observations on existential philosophy and literature
Understand and discuss coherently the central philosophical issues, such as the problem of evil, the existence of God, free will, the mind/body relation, human knowledge, and the question of being.	- Students write one essay on issues developed primarily by Soren Kierkegaard, including the nature of faith and the absurd. Many essays were completed by an analysis of the meaning of being as articulated by Gabriel Marcel.	- 40% of the students performed at a level of excellence in this (first) assignment - 50% of the students performed well or average - 10% of the students were unable to effectively complete this assignment in the time originally allotted, but eventually managed to complete it.	- My initial impression of the class was that, like many courses, I had a number of savants and others who required continual explanation of how to approach complex material.
Demonstrate an ability to identify and articulate, both orally and in writing, the primary philosophical themes and issues found in the writings of the major philosophers.	- Students engage in classroom discussion and write one essay comparing the notions of absurdity (Camus and Sartre) and the ethics of decision (Beauvoir), with particular reference to the latter's "The Woman Destroyed."	- It remains difficult for many students to comfortably articulate their ideas on philosophical themes orally. Their written analyses, however, often belie their apparent inability to engage in dialogue in large groups	- Increase use of monitored Blackboard student engagement to provide alternate means of student-to-student interaction. -Use of literature increases student insight as reference to character and plot helps provide reference points for philosophical clarification

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<p>Demonstrate an ability to evaluate philosophical arguments critically, both orally and in writing, using philosophical methods that have been developed by either historical or contemporary philosophers.</p>	<p>- Students write their final essay as a comparative investigation of existential ideas on despair, loneliness, death, etc. with the ideas of contemporary, “post-existentialist” writers using different philosophical and methodological approaches</p>	<p>- 50% of the students provided remarkably incisive and individual accounts of the relevance of an existentialist approach to contemporary problems within a consumer society guided by virtual pleasures - 50% managed to reproduce the central ideas, if not imaginatively, at least showing a decent level of comprehension</p>	<p>- The methodology and specific content of existentialism effectively generates a unique perspective on contemporary hyper-consumerism and the concomitant loss of identity that is prolonged by a post-crisis society</p>
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**Additional evidence that the general core learning outcomes are being met: ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT THE GENERAL CORE LEARNING OUTCOMES ARE BEING MET:**

Of course, all of the above appears to divide the assessment and learning into relatively neat categories, according to specific assignments. In reality, each of the assignments fulfills additional assessment tasks covered by the others. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that this course is a progressive learning course in which students learn over time and through practice how to develop their own ideas on issues of human existence and reality, according to their interpretation of their situation. In their own words, however:

“I’ve learned so much more than I could have ever expected from a core class at USF. ... I feel more at peace with the universe after having taken your class. If there’s anything that I plan to take with me, it’s the concept of living absolutley. ...but I refuse to allow the past and angst about the future to imprison me any longer.

EVIDENCE THAT COURSE SUPPORTED THE MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY (Offer the “...knowledge and skills needed to succeed as persons and professionals, and the values and sensitivity necessary to be men and women for others” ):

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Presumably, evidence for this can only be obtained over the long run. However, the personal nature of existential explorations—including the question of one's purpose, authenticity, freedom for oneself and its basis in the freedom of others, how to manage in a world abandoned by other powers, etc.—make this a class uniquely designed to provide “the values and sensitivity necessary to be men and women for others.” Again, in the students' own words:

“As a business student, philosophy was both challenging and refreshing in my very structured major. I must say that your Existentialism course was a highlight of my studies at USF, and as nice way to culminate my personal thinking and development with this university.”

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<p>Understand the value of thinking philosophically by reflecting on the meaning of one's own life, the conceptual foundations of human actions and beliefs, the nature of the self and of human responsibility.</p>	<p>Students are required to read the news and to apply news stories to the ethical theories presented in class on a daily basis. A final ethics research paper is due at the end of the semester, where a student is to use four resources and apply an ethical theory in their discussion and analysis of a current ethical issue. By doing these activities, students gain the ability to speak thoughtfully and write competently about difficult ethical concepts and philosophical ideas.</p>	<p>Last semester, even though I had devoted a whole class period to philosophical writing, research requirements and warned against plagiarism, I found that six students had plagiarized and several more did not meet the minimum requirements for the ethics paper. The students who had come to me and submitted an outline (which was optional) overall did much better than those who did not.</p>	<p>I think the issue of plagiarism is a troubling one at USF. With the requirement of turnitin.com, students still risk plagiarising someone else's work rather than rely on their own writing exclusively. Perhaps there needs to be a whole week devoted to educating the students about plagiarism, giving explicit examples from past papers to show what constitutes plagiarising a text. Simply saying that it is borrowing another's words or ideas without acknowledging the source, I have found, is not sufficient.</p>
<p>Understand and discuss coherently the central philosophical issues, such as the problem of evil, the existence of God, free will, the mind/body relation, human knowledge, and the question of being.</p>	<p>This semester I required students to write daily in class essays on the reading, to ensure that the students were 1) accountable for reading of philosophical and ethical literature and 2) that they understood the concepts of friendship, justice, virtue, happiness, evil, providence and responsibility.</p>	<p>The essays worked well and I was able to know, on a daily basis, which students were keeping up with the reading and who were understanding the concepts and which students were not. This enabled me to contact those students at an early date who were having trouble with motivation or understanding the texts and to assist them.</p>	<p>The advantage of having in-class daily essays is that students come prepared and the class discussions were much better this semester than the previous semesters. However, with 80 students, I was grading roughly 160 essays a week, which was a lot of work. There must be a better way to make students accountable for the reading. Next semester I will try weekly rather than daily essays.</p>

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<p>Demonstrate an ability to identify and articulate, both orally and in writing, the primary philosophical themes and issues found in the writings of the major philosophers.</p>	<p>Students who did not have an A/A- average for their daily in class essays had to take the final at the end of the semester. There was no mid-term, since the daily essays ensured that students were being tested on their knowledge and understanding of the material on a daily basis.</p>	<p>I had several students come up to me and express their thanks for the daily in class essays. I was surprised to hear this as the essays were considerable work, both for the students and myself. They admitted that for the most part they wouldn't have done the reading unless it was for a mid-term or final exam. Having the in-class essays motivated the students to keep up with the reading and they were able to get more from the lecture and class discussions than if they had not done the reading. Perhaps this is an obvious revelation but the students themselves admitted that they worked the hardest this semester for my class because they were held accountable on a daily basis for the reading, and consequently, they received more from my class than some of the other classes that they did not regularly do the reading for. I even had one student admit that she would meet with other students twice a week to discuss the material they had read for my class, to ensure they would do well on the in-class essays. Not having to take the final was a big motivation for many students to do well on the essays.</p>	<p>Students improved in their writing and thinking of philosophical and ethical issues and I could see this improvement on a weekly basis. However, as I have written above, the work load for me was enormous. Perhaps having only one quiz or essay a week could alleviate some of the work load for me. I found that last semester I had little time for relaxation, as I was constantly grading/entering grades or preparing for lectures. Sometimes I would teach with very little sleep. Yet, in the end, to hear that the students met outside of class to discuss what they were learning and reading for the class, made all the hard work pay off. For me, I love teaching and especially ethics, I truly think that this is the most important class the students will take in college. I don't mind the sacrifice but at the same time, I must maintain a sane schedule. I was happy to find that I have three returning students from this ethics course who will be taking my Great Philosophical Questions course next fall.</p>
<p>Demonstrate an ability to evaluate philosophical arguments critically, both orally and in writing, using philosophical methods that have been developed by either historical or contemporary philosophers.</p>	<p>Again, students were required on a daily basis, whether it was a whole class discussion or smaller group discussions, to consider, argue and reflect the most pressing ethical issues of the day and to</p>	<p>Overall, I was very happy with the learning outcomes of the class.</p>	<p>Again, I need to find a way to assess and make accountable student learning that allows me to pursue my academic writing and research interests.</p>

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	apply the reasoning they had garnered from the three main ethical theories that have had the most influence on philosophical and ethical thought: virtue ethics, Kantianism and utilitarianism. Students were required to write and to talk about current issues as they related to the philosophical readings.		
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**Additional evidence that the general core learning outcomes are being met:By listening and reading to students' responses about the assigned philosophical literature and reading the ethics research papers, I am confident that the core learning outcomes which had been articulated in this assessment and in my course syllabus have been met.**