

## **Ethical Reasoning Assessment for the LA&S Review**

### **Summary:**

Beginning in Spring 2009 Ethical Reasoning was assessed with a rubric that contained 3 criteria: Position Statement, Rationale Development and Fairness Toward Opposition. In Spring 2009 18 philosophy papers were assessed with this rubric. There appears to have been a break from Spring 2009 to Fall 10, perhaps due to a lack of sufficient student artifacts. However, in the fall of 2010 a large number of artifacts were collected with one subset coming from a Fitchburg State course taught traditionally, while the others came from online courses.

Starting in the fall of 2011 Fitchburg State University revised the Ethical Reasoning rubric to add more categories. Artifacts of student work were now scored on criteria related to moral reasoning, statement of position, ethical issue recognition, application of ethical perspectives, development of rationale, ethical self-awareness and evaluation of different ethical perspectives. We have data from Fall 2011 and Fall 2012. No appropriate papers for ethical reasoning assessment were collected in Spring 2012, Fall 2013, and Spring 2014. Assessment has not been completed yet for the Fall 2014 papers.

Based on the changes in the rubric and variations in the courses it is hard to draw any general conclusions about the area of ethical reasoning. While the analyses with the initial rubric suggest a pattern of weakness in representing opposing positions, the data from the online courses contradict this. However, that data may not be representative of Fitchburg State students and was derived from a single scorer rather than the paired scoring model we normally use. However the wide variation in the data generated by the new rubric when used to assess two different philosophy papers suggests that some combination of rubric revision and scorer training may be necessary in the area of ethical reasoning to produce useful results.

Overall, the data suggests more about the process of assessment than it does about the students themselves. Small sample sizes in most years and gaps of years when appropriate artifacts could not be collected for ethical reasoning suggest that if we hope to evaluate student ethical reasoning in courses, a more comprehensive approach needs to be taken to insure that students are asked to engage in meaningful ethical reasoning assignments across many courses and that we collect larger samples of student work for assessment purposes.

### **Analysis of Data:**

Artifacts for the Spring 2009 assessment came from a 2000-level philosophy class. Students in this group appear to have had more difficulty recognizing and fairly representing positions not their own than they did stating and developing their own perspectives (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Ethical Reasoning**  
**Spring 2009**

	<b>Statement of position (N = 18)</b>	<b>Development of rationale (N = 18)</b>	<b>Fairness toward opposing positions (N=18)</b>
Proficient	50%	67%	28%
Sufficient	39%	33%	67%
Deficient	11%	0%	6%

The data for Fall 2010 Fitchburg State LA&S were based on 24 argumentative research papers from a Global Issues course, each assessed two times (Table 2). They reveal a slight pattern of lower scores in terms of fairness toward opposing positions but the results are not as clear-cut as from the prior year's assessment.

**Table 2**  
**Ethical Reasoning**  
**Fall 2010**

	<b>Statement of position (N = 24)</b>	<b>Development of rationale (N = 24)</b>	<b>Fairness toward opposing positions (N=24)</b>
Proficient	33%	29%	28%
Sufficient	33%	47%	39%
Deficient	33%	24%	33%

Data based on 173 students in World Religions (Table 3) and 205 in Philosophy of Love (Table 4) in the fall of 2010 reveal a reverse pattern in which students score highest in terms of fairness towards opposing positions. However, these artifacts were each scored by only a single scorer and they represent a broader sample of students than the Fitchburg State student body.

**Table 3**  
**Ethical Reasoning**  
**Fall 2010**

	<b>Statement of position (N = 173)</b>	<b>Development of rationale (N = 173)</b>	<b>Fairness toward opposing positions (N=173)</b>
Proficient	32%	24%	54%
Sufficient	50%	64%	40%
Deficient	18%	12%	6%

**Table 4**  
**Ethical Reasoning**  
**Fall 2010**

	<b>Statement of position (N = 205)</b>	<b>Development of rationale (N = 205)</b>	<b>Fairness toward opposing positions (N=205)</b>
Proficient	47%	37%	70%
Sufficient	45%	56%	23%
Deficient	8%	7%	6%

In its initial application, the revised rubric appeared to be difficult for scorers to use as 19 papers from Philosophy of Human Nature were evaluated and none of them were deemed appropriate to score for moral reasoning, ethical issue recognition or development of rationale (Table 5). This occurred in spite of the fact that papers covered topics such as an analysis of hedonism and included references. Roughly one third of students were judged as deficient in the areas of statement of position and application of ethical perspectives/concepts, a level of poor results only seen previously in the analysis of Global Issues papers in 2010.

**Table 5**  
**Ethical Reasoning**  
**Fall 2011 (n = 19)**

<b>Criteria</b>	Proficient	Sufficient	Deficient	NA/NO
Moral Reasoning	0%	0%	0%	100%
Statement of Position	21%	47%	32%	0%
Ethical Issue Recognition	0%	0%	0%	100%
Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	37%	32%	32%	0%
Development of Rationale	0%	0%	0%	100%
Ethical Self Awareness	18%	63%	18%	0%
Evaluation of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	29%	50%	21%	0%

While faculty were better able to score papers across all criteria using artifacts from a Social and Political Philosophy course in 2012 (Table 6), the results varied widely for some of those categories that were scored on both rubrics. Scores for statement of position were substantially better than had been observed on the Philosophy of Human Nature paper, but worse in terms of applying ethical concepts with over 40% of students scored as deficient, and much worse in terms of ethical self-awareness with 62% of students scored as deficient. Given that this assignment, like the one from the previous year asked students to analyze a philosophical concept, it seems unlikely that differences in the assignments alone account for the change in scoring. Instead as mentioned in the summary, further work may be needed on the

rubric accompanied by training to prepare faculty for using a revised rubric. However, it cannot be discounted that the small sample sizes of 19 and 9 may also contribute to the variation in the data, suggesting the need for a more standardized approach to gathering and scoring larger samples of student work.

**Table 6**  
**Ethical Reasoning**  
**Fall 2012 (n = 9)**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Sufficient</b>	<b>Deficient</b>	<b>NA/NO</b>
Moral Reasoning	28%	72%	0%	0%
Statement of Position	28%	67%	6%	0%
Ethical Issue Recognition	6%	39%	56%	6%
Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	12%	47%	41%	0%
Development of Rationale	22%	44%	33%	11%
Ethical Self Awareness	0%	38%	62%	0%
Evaluation of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	0%	78%	22%	0%