

ETHICS CORE ASSESSMENT REPORT

OFFICE OF ASSESSMENT

JANUARY, 2019

Introduction

The Core student learning objectives identify the educational priorities for all undergraduates in Santa Clara University's Core Curriculum. Assessment of student learning is ongoing in the Core—we seek to understand in what areas of the learning objectives students are challenged or excel, and the ways in which we can enhance student learning and better support faculty teaching in these areas.

This assessment report summarizes the process and findings from an assessment of the four learning objectives for the Ethics Core requirement. When the 2009 Core was approved, the requirement was described in the following way:

The Jesuit character of the university promotes sustained attention to moral philosophy as applied to the problems of contemporary life. A course in this area helps students to understand how major ethical theories construe ideals such as justice, happiness, virtue, dignity, rights, and equality. It helps students to apply these theories to questions of how individuals and institutions should act in the world.

The ethics requirement advances students' ability to think and write critically about moral problems, concepts, and ideals. Students should grasp the essence of major ethical theories and be able to apply them to personal, professional, or institutional decisions that are normative in nature.

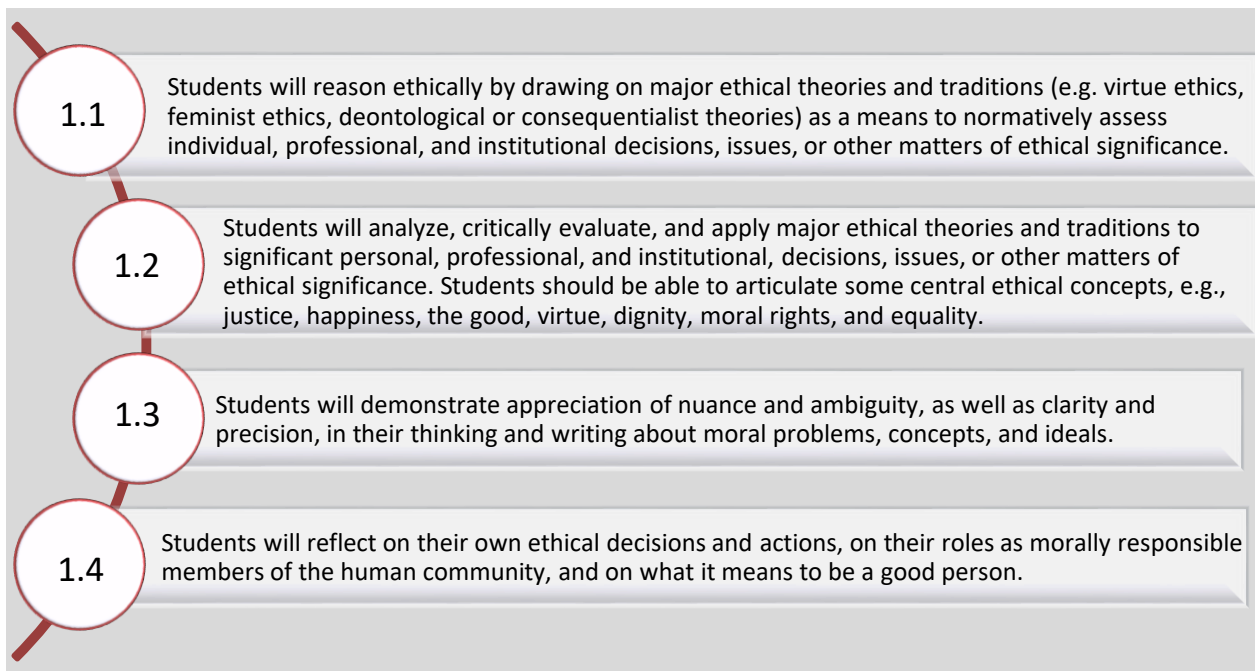
Students should be advised to take the ethics course in the sophomore year, when they have reached a level of maturity that is most appropriate to the subject. Ethical content is, and ought to be, incorporated across the curriculum and co-curriculum as well.

The Core Learning goals identified for Ethics include:

- Arts and Humanities: The production, interpretation, and social influence of the fine and performing arts, history, languages, literatures, philosophy, and religion.
- Complexity: An approach to understanding the world that appreciates ambiguity and nuance as well as clarity and precision.
- Critical Thinking: The ability to identify, reflect upon, evaluate, integrate, and apply different types of information and knowledge to form independent judgments.
- Ethical Reasoning: Drawing on ethical traditions to assess the consequences of individual and institutional decisions.

The Assessment Process

In Fall quarter 2017-18, the Office of Assessment asked faculty teaching Ethics courses in the core curriculum to participate in the assessment of the four Ethics learning objectives.



Student work was collected from a random sample of students representing 14% of the 579 enrolled students in the Ethics classes. Faculty teaching the courses identified the assignments or exam questions providing the clearest evidence for student learning with respect to the four learning objectives. The Office of Assessment obtained student work from 81 students from 17 of the 22 classes offered, redacting student and faculty identifiers from this material.

The following quarter, five faculty and one staff member participated in the assessment of the students' work. Each faculty member attended one of two norming sessions to become familiar with the rubric used to score student work (see Appendix). Student learning for each objective was scored on a four-point proficiency scale. After the norming sessions were completed, the remaining student work was distributed among the raters to be scored. About 37% of the work was scored by two raters in order to examine whether the rubric was applied consistently across raters. Inter-rater reliability (IRR) was calculated using the software program AgreeStat® for the two learning objectives. The agreement coefficient Gwet's AC2 was interpreted, using simple ordinal weights and Landis-Koch benchmarks (see Table 1).

Table 1. Agreement Coefficients

Learning Objective	Gwet's AC2	Benchmark
LO 1.1	0.61	Moderate
LO 1.2	0.80	Substantial
LO 1.3	0.82	Substantial
LO1.4	0.63	Moderate

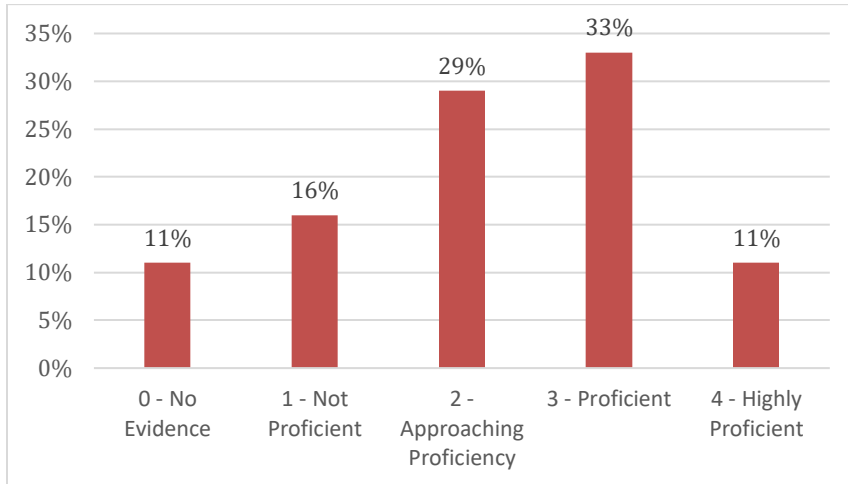
What We Learned

All rubric scores given for each learning objective were tabulated and converted into percentages.

LO 1.1: *Students will reason ethically by drawing on major ethical theories and traditions (e.g. virtue ethics, feminist ethics, deontological or consequentialist theories) as a means to normatively assess individual, professional, and institutional decisions, issues, or other matters of ethical significance.*

Forty-four percent of the student work was judged as proficient or highly proficient for learning objective 1.1 (see Figure 1). Another 29% of student work was judged as approaching proficiency and 16% was rated as not proficient. However, 11% was scored as “no evidence,” indicating the scorers did not see evidence that the student work addressed the learning objective at all.

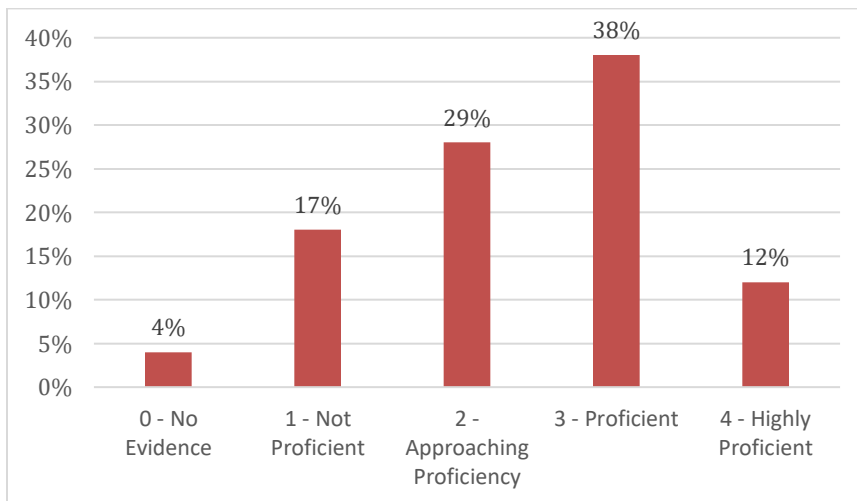
Figure 1. Percent of Rubric Scores for Learning Objective 1.1



LO 1.2: Students will analyze, critically evaluate, and apply major ethical theories and traditions to significant personal, professional, and institutional, decisions, issues, or other matters of ethical significance. Students should be able to articulate some central ethical concepts, e.g., justice, happiness, the good, virtue, dignity, moral rights, and equality.

Proficiency was slightly higher for LO 1.2 with 50% of the student work receiving a score of 3 or 4 (See Figure 2). An additional 29% of the work was scored as approaching proficiency. Compared to LO 1.1, almost the same percent of the work was scored as not proficient (17%) and a much lower percent as showing no evidence of learning pertaining to LO 1.2 (4%).

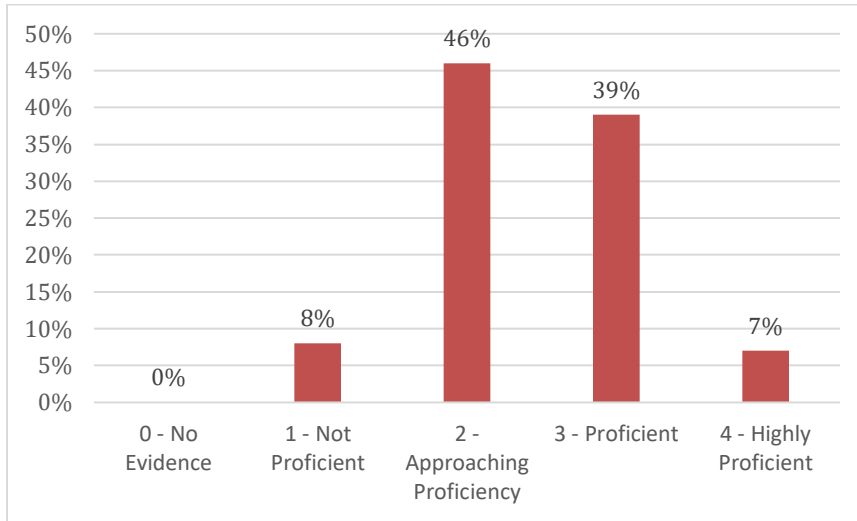
Figure 2. Percent of Rubric Scores for Learning Objective 1.2



LO 1.3: Students will demonstrate appreciation of nuance and ambiguity, as well as clarity and precision, in their thinking and writing about moral problems, concepts, and ideals.

Close to half (46%) of the student work was judged as proficient or highly proficient (See Figure 3), with the same percentage (46%) of work scored as approaching proficiency. Eight percent was scored as not proficient.

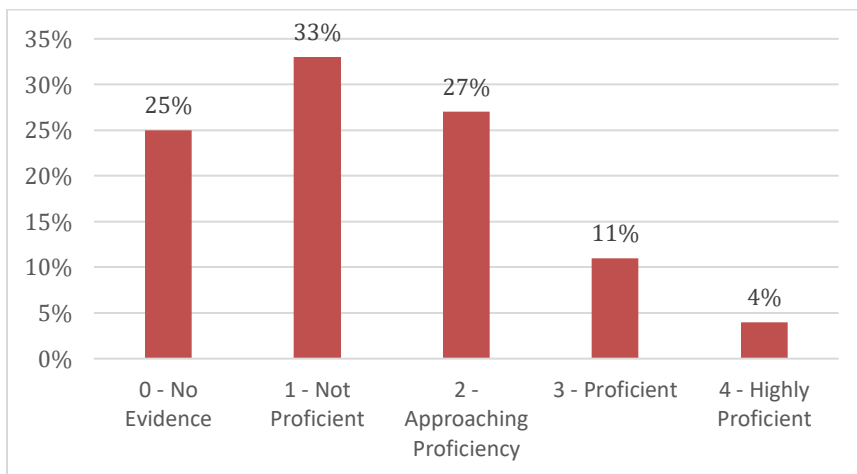
Figure 3. Percent of Rubric Scores for Learning Objective 1.3



LO 1.4: Students will reflect on their own ethical decisions and actions, on their roles as morally responsible members of the human community, and on what it means to be a good person.

Only 15% of the student work was rated as proficient or highly proficient for LO 1.4), with another 27% approaching proficiency (see Figure 4). One-third of the student work (33%) was judged as not proficient and an additional 25% of the work submitted did not address the learning objective.

Figure 4. Percent of Rubric Scores for Learning Objective 1.4



Differences among students

Scores were also examined by selected student characteristics to see if there were statistically significant differences by student gender or race and ethnicity. No statistically significant differences were found for scores by gender or race/ethnicity.

However, differences in scores were found for students taking an ethics core course in their first year compared to students taking the ethics core later in their academic career. In particular, there were significant differences between first-years and more advanced students for LO 1.1 and LO 1.2. As Table 2 shows the mean rubric scores are considerably lower for first-year students than more advanced students.

Table 2. Differences in Mean Scores for First-Years and Upper-Class Students

	First-Year Mean (N = 32)	Soph-Senior Mean (N = 49)
LO 1. 1	1.70	2.50
LO 1.2	1.94	2.60
LO 1.3	2.30	2.61
LO 1.4	1.55	1.42

Conclusions

The learning objectives for the Core Ethics area require students to analyze and evaluate theories and concepts, and to apply their analyses to real world problems. Each of the learning objectives asks that students engage in complex cognitive processes that go well beyond recall or demonstrating understanding. Additionally, the learning objectives themselves are multi-dimensional (e.g., 1.2 asks students to “analyze, critically evaluate, and apply major ethical theories and traditions to significant personal, professional, and institutional, decisions, issues, or other matters of ethical significance. Students should be able to articulate some central ethical concepts, e.g., justice, happiness, the good, virtue, dignity, moral rights, and equality.”). This complexity can create challenges both for faculty who are designing assignments to be inclusive of all these elements, and students who are responding to assignment prompts.

The faculty who evaluated the student work made some additional observations about students’ work for several of the learning objectives. Some of the raters noted an absence of students’ clearly drawing on major ethical theories and traditions in work that addressed LO 1.1. Instead, students might make a reference to a theory (e.g., utilitarianism), but not demonstrate explicitly *how* they were using the theory to reason through an ethical issue. LO 1.2 asks students to provide a critical *evaluation* of an ethical theory or tradition, as well as an *application* of that theory or tradition to an ethical issue. Work that received a lower score often fell short on either the critical evaluation or the application.

Another factor, as noted above, is the level of the student. The proportion of student work reaching proficiency does increase when we look at students who are in their second year or beyond. After their first year at SCU and the completion of other formative coursework such as CTW1 and 2 and C & I 1 and 2, students will have gained important skills and practice in critical thinking, writing and analysis, in addition to another year of cognitive maturation. It may be for all of these reasons that we see quite a bit of student work falling into the approaching proficiency category, rather than reaching or exceeding proficiency. Ideally, we would hope to see the average score for students in their second year or above reach a three on all the dimensions of the rubric.

The scores for LO 1.4 diverge from those for the other learning objectives. This objective asks students to reflect on their own ethical decisions and actions, on their roles as morally responsible members of the human community, and on what it means to be a good person. It became clear that very little work actually addressed the element of personal reflection, and for this reason, the work was judged as providing no evidence of student learning or a lack of proficiency. It is possible that students are doing this type of work in class discussions, but it did not appear that the students included this type of analysis in the work that was submitted for the assessment.

Recommendations

- Emphasize the importance of waiting until sophomore year to take the Core Ethics requirement.
 - The lower scores of the first-year students compared to all other students provides support for the recommendation in the approved 2009 Core Proposal that students should be advised to take the ethics course after their first year, when they have reached a level of maturity that is most appropriate to the subject.
- Review the learning objectives and discuss assignment strategies to address LO 1.1 and LO1.2.
 - Faculty scorers suggested that further discussions take place among faculty teaching Core Ethics courses on how to differentiate between LO 1.1 and 1.2 (or clearly craft assignments that address both). Both learning objectives ask for critical analysis or evaluation and some type of analysis. The Ethics FCC may wish to revisit the phrasing of these learning objectives to clarify them, or provide some additional suggestions for faculty about how to address these. Several faculty scorers expressed interest in developing a repository of assignments that could provide ideas for how to develop clear assignment prompts that address one or more of the learning objectives.
- Discuss how to approach the assessment of LO 1.4.
 - It will also be important for the faculty teaching in the area to discuss the findings for LO 1.4 and how they approach student learning that deals with reflection on decisions, their roles as morally responsible members of the human community, and what it means to be a good person. If most of this objective is addressed through class discussions, for example, can students document their learning in any form?

Acknowledgments: The Office of Assessment thanks the Ethics FCC, the faculty teaching Core courses who participated in the assessment, the faculty members who participated as scorers for the student work, and Kyla Inouye, our student assistant, who contributed to the many stages of the assessment process.

Appendix: Scoring Rubric for Ethics Assessment of Student Learning

Objective	Highly proficient (4)	Proficient (3)	Approaching proficiency (2)	Not proficient (1)
<p>1.1 Reason ethically by drawing on major ethical theories and traditions (e.g. virtue ethics, feminist ethics, deontological or consequentialist theories) as a means to normatively assess individual, professional, and institutional decisions, issues, or other matters of ethical significance.</p>	<p>Demonstrates evidence of precise and rigorous ethical reasoning grounded in a comprehensive and clear understanding of major ethical theories or traditions to normatively assess and analyze decisions or issues of ethical significance facing self or society.</p>	<p>Demonstrates evidence of ethical reasoning grounded in a solid understanding of major ethical theories or traditions to normatively assess and analyze decisions or issues of ethical significance facing self or society.</p>	<p>Demonstrates some evidence of ethical reasoning based on major ethical theories or traditions but the reasoning, understanding of theories or traditions, or the ability to provide a normative assessment of decisions or issues is incomplete or somewhat flawed.</p>	<p>Demonstrates little evidence of ethical reasoning based on major ethical theories or traditions or the reasoning, understanding of theories or traditions, or the ability to provide a normative assessment of decisions or issues is not evident or significantly flawed.</p>
<p>1.2 Analyze, critically evaluate, and apply major ethical theories and traditions to significant personal, professional, and institutional, decisions, issues, or other matters of ethical significance. Students should be able to articulate some central ethical concepts, e.g., justice, happiness, the good, virtue, dignity, moral rights, and equality.</p>	<p>Critically evaluates and thoughtfully applies ethical theories and traditions to a significant ethical question or issue. Response incorporates relevant central ethical concepts appropriately and insightfully.</p>	<p>Analyzes and provides some critical evaluation in applying ethical theories and traditions to a significant ethical question or issue. Response incorporates central ethical concepts, though they may not be fully developed.</p>	<p>Applies at least one ethical theory or tradition to a significant ethical question or issue, but with little development, analysis, or evaluation, or the application may be flawed. Response is very limited in addressing central ethical concepts—it may do so superficially, or with some inaccuracies.</p>	<p>Applies at least one ethical theory or tradition to a significant ethical question or issue, but do so very superficially or inaccurately. Response may not address central ethical concepts or misapply them.</p>

Objective	Highly proficient	Proficient	Approaching proficiency	Not proficient
<p>1.3 Demonstrate appreciation of nuance and ambiguity, as well as clarity and precision, in their thinking and writing about moral problems, concepts, and ideals.</p>	<p>Communicates a sophisticated (both nuance/ambiguity and clarity/precision) understanding of the challenges, complexities, and multiple interpretations of moral problems, concepts and ideals.</p>	<p>Communicates a basic understanding (some nuance/ambiguity and some clarity/precision) of the challenges, complexities, and multiple interpretations of moral problems, concepts and ideals.</p>	<p>Communicates limited understanding (only has nuance/ambiguity or clarity/precision) of the challenges, complexities, and multiple interpretations of moral problems, concepts and ideals, but response is heavily structured around one interpretation or may be dismissive of other perspectives.</p>	<p>Communicates no real understanding (missing both nuance/ambiguity and clarity/precision) of the challenges, complexities, and multiple interpretations of moral problems, concepts and ideals, either because the multiple perspectives are not developed at all or the writing/thinking is not at all clear.</p>
<p>1.4 Reflect on their own ethical decisions and actions, on their roles as morally responsible members of the human community, and on what it means to be a good person.</p>	<p>Provides insightful analysis of how one's ethical decisions or actions are shaped by one's personal value system / worldview, other institutional core values, professional guidelines, or societal laws. Response shows evidence of thoughtful reflection about what it means to be a responsible member of the human community and a good person.</p>	<p>Provides a reasonably developed analysis of how one's ethical decisions or actions are shaped by one's personal value system / worldview, other institutional core values, professional guidelines, or societal laws. Response shows evidence of reflection about what it means to be a responsible member of the human community and a good person.</p>	<p>Provides some analysis of how one's ethical decisions or actions are shaped by one's personal value system / worldview, other institutional core values, professional guidelines, or societal laws, but the attention to these factors may be fairly superficial. Response shows limited evidence of reflection about what it means to be a responsible member of the human community and a good person.</p>	<p>Provides very limited or no analysis of how one's ethical decisions or actions are shaped by one's personal value system / worldview, other institutional core values, professional guidelines, or societal laws. Response may not include reflection about what it means to be a responsible member of the human community and a good person.</p>