In consultation with the Philosophy Department and with the help of the Teagle team, I have designed a rubric that addresses the following departmental goal drawn from a list of our departmental goals:

Departmental Learning Goal: Students should learn to discern distinct arguments in philosophical texts and effectively present them in written work.

The objectives involved in this goal are listed on the rubric and are as follows:

Departmental Learning Objectives:
1. Isolate a line of argument from the text.
2. Show a good grasp of the problem to which the argument is a response.
3. Distinguish the crucial points of the argument from less important points.
4. Communicate distinct points of the argument in precise, concise prose.
5. Present the distinct points of the argument in an effective order.
6. Present the argument in light of the paper’s thesis in a fair and effective manner.
7. Evaluate the cogency of the argument and present clear reasons in support of her evaluation.

All members of the department who are teaching an appropriate introductory course in the spring of 2013 will fill out the rubric for each paper they grade. Appropriate courses include Introduction to Philosophy courses and First Year Seminars. Each instructor of such a course will use the rubric to mark off whether a given paper has achieved each of the above objectives “With Excellence,” “Very Well,” “Satisfactorily,” or “Not At All.” Each rubric will have the course number, the student’s name, and the date of the paper listed so that we may track information such as the type of introductory course, the point in the semester the paper was written, and the progression of improvement (or lack thereof) for first year as opposed to upper class students.

Although there is consensus in the department about the goal and the break down of objectives, we will not communicate the results of the use of this rubric at this time to the students. We feel that since this is the first time we are using it, it is still experimental. Although some of us, of course, are already making explicit use of some of these objectives, part of the use of this exercise for us is to become more explicit with ourselves as well as our students about the most useful way to break down the objectives of a given goal.

At the end of the semester we will meet to discuss how useful it was to implement the rubric in its current form, the results and implications of the information provided by collating the information the completed rubrics supply us in various ways, as well as what the whole process suggests for how we might better teach the chosen goal and alternative ways for assessing the goal.