

Philosophy Department (Draft) Program Assessment Plan

I. Departmental Mission and Goals

1). Mission

Executing its mission, the philosophy department fosters philosophical thinking at USF by providing intellectually engaging majors and minors for students, offering excellent courses in the Core, and supporting the philosophy faculty and students in the creation of a learning community. Philosophy grounds education in the Jesuit, Catholic tradition. The department upholds that tradition in the major, minor and Core curriculum. Consonant with the University's mission, the philosophy department offers diverse courses to educate, "men and women for others."

2). Goals

We teach students to philosophize. We do so by giving them an excellent grounding in the fundamental subjects, key movements, and central figures in the history of philosophy. We emphasize the development of superior reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. By means of our major, we prepare students well for graduate school. We attract diverse students to philosophy, maintain a diverse faculty, and offer diverse courses. We gladly sustain the crucial role of philosophy in the Core with intellectually engaging courses in areas D-1 and D-3.

II. Program Learning Objectives (PLOs)

1) Students identify primary philosophical themes found in the writings of major philosophers.

- a) Below expectations: The student shows little or no understanding of the basic texts, traditions, theories, questions, and values that constitute the history of philosophical thought. The student is unable to demonstrate a meaningful understanding in her written and oral arguments.
- b) Minimal acceptable: The student shows a general understanding of the basic texts, traditions, theories, questions, and values that constitute the history of philosophical thought. The student is also able to demonstrate this understanding in her written and oral arguments.
- c) Exemplary: The student provides clear evidence of a nuanced understanding of the basic texts, traditions, theories, questions, and values that constitute the history of philosophical thought. The student is also able

to provide detailed and subtle interpretations in her written and oral arguments.

2) Students write historical and argumentative essays on central philosophical issues.

- a) Below expectations: The student is unable to ask relevant questions, to conceive, suggest and answer those questions, or to support her own positions with appropriate arguments. The student shows little or no understanding of any additional implications of her positions.
- b) Minimal acceptable: The student shows that she is able to ask relevant questions, to conceive, suggest and answer those questions appropriately, and to support her own positions with logically competent arguments. The student can also show an understanding of the more general implications of the question as framed and her position taken on that question.
- c) Exemplary: The student shows that she is able to ask relevant and original questions, to suggest novel answers to those questions, and to support her own positions with creative and compelling arguments. The student can also take into account a range of competing arguments, and show why her position taken is superior to those alternatives.

3) Students develop philosophical arguments using methods originated by historical and contemporary philosophers.

- a) Below expectations: The student is unable to locate information, or inappropriately uses or fails to cite sources. The student shows little or no ability to critically analyze her sources. The student is unable to utilize effective philosophical argumentation to defend a stated thesis.
- b) Minimal acceptable: The student is able to locate, appropriately use, and cite sources with critical analysis and application of those sources. Essays serve to establish a primary thesis by following one accepted method of philosophical argumentation and defending that thesis from competing or alternate interpretations.
- c) Exemplary: The student is able to demonstrate excellence in conducting critical research on philosophical topics. The student can also demonstrate some degree of originality grounded in the source material. Essays provide a basis for further research by including relevant secondary sources and a wide range of primary material.

III. Three Year Assessment Plan, Assessment Goals, & Timeline

The PLOs are embedded in the essays, examination questions and other assignments in four required “foundation” philosophy courses (310 – Ancient and Medieval Philosophy; 312 – Modern Philosophy; 315 – Ethics; and 319 – Logic).

Commencing in the fall semester of 2016, the department will assess its PLOs by assessing one PLO per year:

AY 2016-2017: PLO 1

AY 2017-2018: PLO 2

AY 2018-2019: PLO 3

Our yearly assessments will occur in two steps; the first employs an **indirect** method and the second a **direct** method of assessment.

- a) Indirect: The department will select one of the foundation philosophy courses, as well as one of the D1 or D3 core classes, and collect across two iterations of the courses their syllabi and assignment materials. The collected material will be reviewed to determine whether the courses meet the expectations of the PLO. We will not be comparing the performance of the upper-division course to the lower-division course, but rather examining how the courses across the spectrum of courses we offer meet the PLO.
- b) Direct: The department will then select particular assignments from each course that are reflective of the PLO, collect and review all the student work turned in for those assignments, and determine whether the assignments meet the expectations of the PLO.

The department will review the findings of the assessment and will meet as a whole to recommend methods of (1) improving curricula, (2) establishing effective standards for students' primary understanding of the issues of the field, (3) establishing effective standards for students' skills in analysis, explanation, and logical reasoning, (4) establishing or revising effective priorities for students' research and argumentation skills, and (5) preparing students for success in more advanced courses.

These five goals correspond to essential questions the department continuously has about the development and efficacy of its program; i.e., how can we improve our curricula? How can we improve the students' understanding of our field? How can we improve the philosophical skills of our students? Are we effectively recruiting students for the philosophy major and minor from the Core D1 and D3 course?