

Department of Philosophy
2023-2024 Assessment Report
Due Date: January 2, 2024

Identifying Information:

Name of Program: Philosophy

Type of Program: Major and Minor

Assessment Committee: Geoffrey Ashton, Chair (gashton@usfca.edu), Nick Leonard (nleonard@usfca.edu), and David Kim (kim@usfca.edu).

Mission Statement and Program Learning Outcomes: Since the last assessment, no changes were made to the Philosophy mission statement and the department's program learning outcomes (PLOs). But, as discussed below, this year's assessment involves a wide, "bird's eye" review of the PLOs and the structure of the major.

Curricular Map: No changes were made since the last report.

Assessment Methods: In AY 2021-2022, the department underwent an external review. With the review in mind, the department is taking a "fresh look" at its foundations: its PLOs and the curricular vehicle for satisfying them, the structure of the major. Gathering faculty feedback, the Year of Reflection method will be used to generate a holistic evaluation of the PLOs and the major. This general evaluation will also use an Indirect Method for identifying student concerns and suggestions about the PLOs and the major: a tally of student replies to a questionnaire concerning the PLOs and the major will be provided and considered.

For context, the department's PLOs are as follows:

- 1) Identify primary philosophical themes found in the writings of major philosophers
- 2) Write historical and argumentative essays on central philosophical issues
- 3) Develop philosophical arguments using formal and informal methods originated by historical and contemporary philosophers

And the major requires:

- 1) 44 units,
- 2) four foundational seminars: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Modern Philosophy, Logic, and Advanced Moral Philosophy (previously Ethics for Majors), and
- 3) seven elective seminars, at least four of which must be upper level (300- or 400- level).

Assessment Results

Faculty Reflections on the PLOs and the major:

Two years ago the faculty fine-tuned the language of the PLOs. We continue to be satisfied with the selection and articulation of the three PLOs. As we see it, theme identification, essay writing, and argument formation are core abilities that graduating majors should possess.

By contrast, the major, as the curricular vehicle for delivering the PLOs, has been a matter of much concern to the faculty, and deliberations over the major are still at an early stage. So

the results for this year's assessment are tenuous, and reconsideration of the major will be the subject of the next assessment as well (AY 2024-2025).

At its fall retreat, the department considered a news article on the decline of humanities majors, expressed concerns about the major, and brainstormed some initial ideas about how the major might be modified. Two general concerns have been voiced.

1) Due to the shrinking number of FT faculty over the last decade, it is challenging to keep up the faculty rotations for seminars required of the major. This directly affects our ability to meet the PLOs. This also impacts current and future deliberation over the major: Concern about unsustainable rotations *could* force the dept to scale back its aspiration to fulfill its PLOs in what it deems to be an ideal way.

2) Something more basic than meeting PLOs is having a sustainable major in the sense of having a continuously adequate enrollment of majors or minors—a problem widespread in the humanities now.

Regarding (1), the department has annually requested TT-faculty replacement hires, but its numbers have remained less than they were a decade ago. Fortunately, it has been authorized to conduct a TT hire this academic year, and good faith assurance has been given that another TT hire can be conducted upon the next faculty retirement.

Regarding (2), the department is considering how to modify the major to attract more students interested in at least three interest clusters: law and politics, psychology and AI, and international studies and global traditions. One possibility is to create three or four tracks in the major to accommodate these interests. Such reconfigurations in the major can enable the dept to connect with, assist, and benefit from the wider learning ecology at USF. One controversial issue is that some of these tracks lean in an interdisciplinary direction and *can* be designed to accommodate a limited role for non-philosophy faculty teaching our majors.

Disciplinary interests and interdisciplinary tracks aside, the major could also be modified so that it more directly serves with the long-term interests of the student, be it career-readiness, vocational discernment, or moral formation.

Student Feedback on the PLOs and the major:

The department sent out a survey to all majors and minors regarding (a) the current PLOs (b) the courses required for the major and minor and (c) the elective courses that are currently being offered. Only four students responded to the survey, making it difficult to draw any statistically significant conclusions. Here are the main findings.

Students indicated that PLO1, PLO2, and PLO3 are all satisfactory as is. One student suggested offering more courses in metaphysics and epistemology, another suggested offering additional CEL courses, and a third suggested more courses in Eastern Philosophy as well as a course dedicated to Stoicism. Unfortunately the results of the survey do not provide enough evidence to warrant taking any action on the PLOs or our current course offerings.

Assessment Schedule: As noted earlier, the department recently completed an Academic Program Review (in 2022). Prior to that review, it completed full assessment cycles for both its core learning outcomes (D1 and D3) and PLO satisfaction in the major and minor. Last year, right after the Academic Program Review, the department assessed its online and hybrid courses. It plans to continue a review of the major—and, if possible, implement changes—for AY 2023-2024. As noted above, the current assessment is somewhat tentative due to the department still being a preliminary stage of a serious review of the major. Once the major is thoroughly assessed and changes are implemented, it will reassess the PLOs if necessary.

Summary Comments: The results of this assessment indicate that faculty and students find the three PLOs to be satisfactory. The department will now consider whether and how to redesign the structure of both the major and the minor.