

Philosophy Department Program Assessment Report Final Version September 20, 2017.

This report follows up on the plans laid out in the “Philosophy Department Program Assessment Plan” (submitted 10/29/15), and the “2014-2016 Assessment Plan Philosophy Department” (submitted 11/18/15). Those plans are consistent with the action plan from the last APR, which is reproduced in **Section A**. The details of our plan are reviewed below in **Section B**, and the department’s assessment activities during AY 2016-2017 are reported in **Section C**.

The department last had an external program review (APR) in the spring of 2014. We are scheduled to have one again in the **spring of 2020**.

A. 2014-2016 Assessment Plan Philosophy Department

Excerpted from the *Department’s Academic Program Review Self-Study*, September 10, 2013

The department will continue to develop its courses, and it will periodically review and revise the learning outcomes for the courses it offers to the university Core, as well as the foundations and elective courses for its majors. Our biggest concern is to fill the gap left by Ray Dennehy’s retirement, and to find a replacement who will meet the curricular needs of the department.

Following the timeline we previously followed for assessing our program for the University Core, over the next three years we will review our outcomes and assess how our foundation courses (those that fulfill the requirements for our major and minor) have met are goals set forth in our Program Learning Outcomes and our Program Goal. We are satisfied with the results and the process of our WASC review. In the following years we will meet to consider how we are meeting our Program Learning Outcomes and our Program Goals.

- (1) *May 2014*: The department will meet to assess how our foundations courses are meeting our Program Learning Outcomes.
- (2) *May 2015*: Given our discussion from 2014, we will meet to assess any changes we may have made, and to address any issues or concerns that were raised from the previous review.
- (3) *May 2016*: The department will repeat the above process of assessing how our foundation courses are meeting our Outcomes and any changes we may have made.

Our core objectives are to assess and improve our learning outcomes. The sequence of action is clearly laid out in our three-student learning assurance plan. Additionally, we will continue to meet the challenges brought on by such changes.

B. The 2014-2016 Philosophy Department 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?

C. Philosophy Department Program Assessment Report for AY 2016-2017

During the 2016-2017 AY, the philosophy department conducted several program activities, which culminated in the successful accomplishment of the first portion of its assessment plans. These activities not only concerned the assessment of the department's program learning outcomes (PLOs), but it also involved:

- a. Reviewing and re-drafting of the department's mission statement,
- b. re-drafting and PLOs for the major and distinguishing them from the ones for the minor,
- c. reviewing the College of Arts and Science's (CAS) Core Learning Outcomes assessment plans for Core Areas D1 and D3,
- d. assessing the department's PLOs.
- e. and conclusions or "closing the loop" on assessment

Each of these activities is detailed below.

a. Review and re-drafting of the department's mission statement.

In September of this AY (9/13/2016), the department reviewed and revised its previous mission statement, which was:

“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.”

After discussing the old mission statement, discussing its purpose, and suggesting changes, the department created and approved the following updated mission statement,

The mission of the B.A. in Philosophy degree program is to provide students with an excellent grounding in the fundamental subjects, key movements, and central figures in the history of philosophy and in ethics. We emphasize the development of superior reading, writing, critical thinking, and logic. We prepare students for a wide variety of careers, including entry into various postgraduate and professional degree programs. Our students and faculty are diverse. Consonant with the University's mission, the department educates men and women for others.

b. Review and Revisal of Philosophy Major and Minor PLOs

At the end of the Spring 2017 semester the department, reviewed our major and minor PLOs. Before then we had one set of PLOs that covered both the major and the minor. We drafted new major PLOs to distinguish them from the minor's, which are now the PLOs we used in the past. Both sets are reproduced below:

Major:

- 1) Students identify primary philosophical themes found in the writings of major ancient, medieval, modern, and moral philosophers.
- 2) Students write historical and argumentative essays on central philosophical issues.
- 3) Students develop philosophical arguments using formal and informal methods originated by historical and contemporary philosophers.

Minor:

- 1) Students identify primary philosophical themes found in the writings of major philosophers.
- 2) Students write historical and argumentative essays on central philosophical issues.

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

c. Review of the CAS's Core D1 (philosophy) and D3 (ethics) assessment

Early in September, following the request of the Core Assessment Committee (CAC), the department communicated to all the instructors of D1 courses, and indeed to all the faculty, that the Core D1 core learning outcomes must be reproduced *verbatim* in their syllabi. Furthermore, it indicated that the syllabus of D1 courses should communicate how those CLOs are satisfied through assignments and other class exercises, and that the syllabus should follow the department's requirements and recommendations for Core D1 and D3 courses. Additionally, anticipating the CAS's assessment of Core Area D1 and D3 courses, the department had a workshop (10/27/2016) for all faculty to review the CAS's assessment plans, timeline, and the D1 rubric provided by the Core Area Working Group (CAWG). The Core D1 and D3 assessment plans are relevant to the department's program assessment plans because its courses that have that designation also reflect the department's PLOs, those courses—almost all of which are lower-division, can count as elective courses for the philosophy major and minor, and two upper-division courses that are restricted to its majors and minors cover respectively the D1 (PHIL 310: Ancient & Medieval Philosophy) and the D3 (PHIL 315: Ethics for Majors) requirements.

c. Department's PLO Assessment

In the spring semester of 2016 the department selected two representative courses for assessment: PHIL 204: Philosophy of Science, taught by David Stump, and PHIL 310: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, taught by Marjolein Oele. Both courses were offered in Fall 2016.

The department met on two occasions to carry out its assessment. First, the department met on Monday, 2/27/17, to assess the courses using the *indirect method* of reviewing their syllabi and representative course materials (e.g., paper assignments). We reviewed the materials to determine whether they were in line with **all three of our PLOs**, and had assignments and other activities that communicated those outcomes. The department appreciated reviewing the course materials of its colleagues, had a fruitful discussion of course design, its PLOs, and determined that the courses and their materials did in fact reflect its PLOs.

Second, on Monday, 4/10/17, the department met to assess the courses using the *direct method* of reviewing student products. Five papers (randomly chosen, ungraded, and anonymized) from each course were submitted for the assessment. Seven department members were present, and papers were distributed so that three different professors reviewed each paper.

The results of the review, using the rubric reported in section A above, are below. Our standards have three categories: below expectations, minimal expectations, and exemplary expectations.

Phil 204

Papers	Standards		
	Exemplary	Minimal Expectations	Below Expectations
Paper 1	0	1	8
Paper 2	1	8	0
Paper 3	0	7	2
Paper 4	3	6	0
Paper 5	0	6	3
Total	4	28	13
Average	.8	5.6	2.6

Phil 310

Papers	Standards		
	Exemplary	Minimal Expectations	Below Expectations
Paper 1	3	6	0
Paper 2	4	5	0
Paper 3	7	2	0
Paper 4	1	7	1
Paper 5	3	6	0
Total	18	26	1
Average	3.6	5.2	.4

d. Closing the Loop

The department discussed these results from the two sessions and considered the following questions: How can we improve our curriculum? 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?

We determined that our current methods were satisfactory and that we are satisfied with our revised PLOs. The Chair at the time (Ron Sundstrom) recommended improving our rubrics by expanding the standards to four and creating a formal rubric table. The department will continue to think about the above questions and how to improve its curriculum.