

To: John Stolle-Mcallister, Associate Dean
CAHSS

From: Jessica Pfeifer, Assessment Coordinator
Department of Philosophy

CC: Steven Yalowitz, Chair
Department of Philosophy

Date: June 30, 2015

Re: Department of Philosophy Assessment Report Spring 2015

Department of Philosophy Assessment Report 2014-2015

Section 1: Learning Goals for Philosophy Majors

1. **Philosophical Content:** Graduates will be familiar with the central concepts, questions, and historical figures of the Western philosophical tradition.
2. **Critical Analysis and Reasoning:** Graduates will be able to identify premises and conclusions of arguments, be able to critically analyze arguments, be able to consider alternative views, and be able to develop and defend their own views.
3. **Logical Reasoning:** Graduates will be able to apply formal techniques of reasoning.
4. **Written and Oral Communication:** Graduates will be able to write clear, well-organized, thorough, and succinct essays and be able to express philosophical concepts and arguments clearly in discussion.

Section 2: Measures and Use of Information

Measures	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Use of the information
Performance on key questions related to program goals on exams or essays in PHIL 321 (History of Philosophy: Ancient) and PHIL 322 (History of Philosophy: Modern)	x				Instructors report results to department Assessment Coordinator biennially. Department supports and encourages the instructors, takes any appropriate department-level actions, and makes a report to Dean.
Performance on key questions on exams or essays in either PHIL 146 (Critical Thinking), PHIL 248 (Introduction to Scientific Reasoning), or PHIL 346 (Deductive Systems).	x	X	x		Instructors report results to department Assessment Coordinator biennially. Department takes action as above.

Performance on key questions on exams or essays in other lower- and upper-division courses		X		x	Instructors report results to Department Assessment Coordinator biennially. Department takes action as above.
Students take exit survey in which they are asked how well they thought they achieved the program goals.	x	X	x	x	Data reviewed biennially for action as above.

Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Data

The Department found that it is doing an excellent job achieving its learning goals. The Department continues to do a particularly good job teaching critical reasoning skills (Goals 2-3). This is not surprising given that this is one the main focuses of all philosophy courses. In light of these findings, the Department has explicitly incorporated Critical Analysis and Reasoning as a learning goal in all of our courses.

Our assessment of PHIL 150 indicated the need to make course specific goals more explicit, as well. In light of this, several faculty have begun using detailed rubrics for grading, which are handed out to students with assignments and exam study guides.

While the Department is also doing a good job achieving Goal 4: Written and Oral Communication, it noted that this was the area most in need of improvement. To aid with this, the Philosophy Department is in the process of developing Writing Intensive sections of PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy and PHIL 152: Introduction to Moral Theory.

The Department has also determined that students need better background in terms of survey courses in particular fields. To address this, the Department has altered the list of courses that will meet our Ethics requirement and our Metaphysics/Epistemology requirement so that only 300-level courses will count, not 400-level. The Department has also changed the level of two Metaphysics/Epistemology courses (Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Language) from 400-level into 300-level survey courses that will also meet the Metaphysics/Epistemology requirement.

Our previous Assessment Report also noted the need for a greater variety of courses for our majors. The Department addressed this in four ways. First, the scheduling coordinator has tried to ensure that faculty regularly rotate courses so that different courses are taught every year. Second, faculty have developed a number of new courses (e.g. PHIL 472: Evolution, PHIL 498 Irrationality and Emotion, PHIL 499: Wittgensteins' 'Philosophical Investigations', PHIL 499: Paradoxes). Third, the Department has hired part-time faculty to cover classes we have been unable to offer due to our low faculty number (e.g. PHIL 344: Asian Philosophy, PHIL 399 Philosophy of Film and PHIL 368: Aesthetics). Fourth, the Department has taken this concern seriously in its hiring decisions over the last few years. We hired three tenure track faculty who are able to teach a diverse range of topics that we have been unable to cover regularly in recent years (e.g. PHIL 420: Fichte and Hegel, PHIL 420: Hegel and Marx, PHIL 452: Aristotle's Ethics, PHIL 481: Plato's 'Republic', PHIL 452: Kant's Ethical Theory). The Senior Exit Survey

continues to indicate the need for additional variety in course offerings, especially at the 300-level. The change of Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Language to 300-level courses ought to help address this.

The Assessment of PHIL 146: Critical Thinking indicated that this course is a good route to learning basic skills in logic (Goal 3: Logical Reasoning). In light of this, the Department has added this course as a possible route for Philosophy Minors to fulfill their Logic requirement.

In order to encourage more student engagement outside of courses, the Department has instituted two changes. First, the faculty advisor to Philanon, our undergraduate philosophy club, has provided additional guidance and oversight. Second, the Department has revived its speaker series and attempted to find a subset of these speakers who focus on topics covered in the courses being taught during the semester of the speaker's visit. A number of faculty have also offered extra credit to students attending and writing summaries of the speaker's talks.

Section 4: Outcomes from Interventions Taken Based on Assessment Data (if applicable)

Our previous Assessment Report highlighted our success in achieving our goals related to Critical Analysis and Reasoning (Goals 2 & 3). In light of these findings, the Department has explicitly incorporated Critical Analysis and Reasoning as a learning goal in all of our courses. Both our Senior Exit Surveys and our direct assessment of individual courses indicate that we continue to excel in this area. Faculty have informally reported that making this goal clear to students on the syllabus has been helpful in guiding students in preparation for exams and in writing essays.

Our assessment of PHIL 150 indicated the need to make course specific goals more explicit, as well. In light of this, several faculty have begun using detailed rubrics for grading, which have been handed out to students with assignments and exam study guides. Our assessments of PHIL 322: History of Philosophy: Modern and PHIL 394: Philosophy of Biology indicate that this has been an effective tool in communicating expectations and hence improving learning outcomes. For example, one of the goals we noted above that needs improvement was Goal 4: Written and Oral Communication. After the institution of rubrics, 100% of the students in PHIL 394 displayed proficiency in achieving the course specific goal used to measure their achievement of Goal 4, and 88% rated Good or better in achieving this goal. Students in PHIL 322 also showed success in achieving the course specific goals associated related to Goal 1: Philosophical Content. 87% of students in PHIL 322 showed Acceptable achievement of Goal 1 in one measure and 89% showed Acceptable achievement in the second measure. Informal feedback from students in both courses indicates that this success is partly due to the use of explicit goals provided by the rubric. The students informally reported that it was helpful knowing more precisely in writing what criteria the instructor was using when grading the assignments.

Our previous Assessment Report also noted the need for a greater variety of courses for our majors. The Department addressed this in several ways, as discussed above. Our Senior Exit Survey shows that this has been effective, though as noted in Section 3 there is still a need for a greater variety of courses at the 300-level, which the Department is addressing by the change of Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Language to the 300-level.

Our attempts to encourage more student engagement outside of courses have also been very effective. Our speaker series has been very well attended by students, and Philanon is thriving.

Section 5: Assessment of Sample General Education Course(s) (if applicable)

PHIL 146	Functional Competency: Critical Analysis and Reasoning	Functional Competency: Critical Analysis and Reasoning
Course-specific goals linked to FC	1) To understand the meaning of "contradictory" 2) To understand the meaning of "contrary"	1) To recognize disjunctive syllogisms 2) To recognize hypothetical syllogisms 3) To recognize categorical syllogisms
How do you assess or measure achievement of those goals?	On Quiz #5, there were two very specific questions related to this competency, and I was aiming for 80% correct answers on these two questions.	The final quiz of the semester had numerous questions in this regard, but I was aiming to get 80% correct answers on three specific questions that I felt addressed these goals clearly.
What did you find?	On the first question (contradictory), only 71% got the correct answer (51/72). On the second question (contrary) 88% got it correct (63/72)	On the first question (disjunctive syllogisms), 91% of students got the correct answer (68/75). On the second question (hypothetical syllogisms), 72% got the correct answer (54/75). On the third question (categorical syllogisms), 67% got the correct answer (48/72).
Changes proposed based on assessment results	While not bad results, I do need to spend a little more time on these terms, especially given how similar they are in appearance. And when you add "contrapositive" into the mix these terms can get jumbled in a student's pretty quickly. Idea: to utilize the online flashcard feature of this edition of the textbook in order to drive home the meaning of some of these terms.	Once again, decent results. But I think I will try to incorporate more real world examples of these types of argument into the class... as opposed to "All whales are mammals, all mammals breathe through lungs, etc."

PHIL 150	Functional Competency: Critical Analysis and Reasoning	Functional Competency: Critical Analysis and Reasoning
Course-specific goals linked to FC	The ability to consider alternative views	The ability to develop and defend their own views
How do you assess or	These abilities were written directly into the instructions for a short	These abilities were written directly into the instructions for a short writing

measure achievement of those goals?	writing project to be completed by all students. Consideration of alternative views was required in the second paragraph. To isolate the two competencies, each paragraph was graded individually.	project to be completed by all students. Defense of the student's own views was required in the third paragraph. To isolate the two competencies, each paragraph was graded individually.
What did you find?	23 students did very well 5 students did acceptably 5 students needed improvement 0 students did unacceptably	20 students did very well 10 students did acceptably 3 students needed improvement 0 students did unacceptably
Changes proposed based on assessment results	Reading the papers suggests that the commonest problem is students trying to cover too much material too quickly, with a result that what gets presented tends to be both unfocused and superficial. This is obviously bad when presenting their own views, and it invites the straw man fallacy when presenting opposing views. Possible solutions include: explicit instruction, inclusion of a writing guide emphasizing thesis sentence / development paragraph structure among course documents, and publication of sample papers.	Reading the papers suggests that the commonest problem is students trying to cover too much material too quickly, with a result that what gets presented tends to be both unfocused and superficial. This is obviously bad when presenting their own views, and it invites the straw man fallacy when presenting opposing views. Possible solutions include: explicit instruction, inclusion of a writing guide emphasizing thesis sentence / development paragraph structure among course documents, and publication of sample papers.

PHIL 368	Functional Competency: Critical Analysis and Reasoning	Functional Competency: Critical Analysis and Reasoning
Course-specific goals linked to FC	Reconstructing author's argument.	Creating own persuasive argument
How do you assess or measure achievement of those goals?	One assignment was assessed with respect to this goal.	One assignment was assessed with respect to this goal.

What did you find?	Mastered Skill: 20 Developing Skill: 3 Needs Improvement: 2	Mastered Skill: 11 Developing Skill: 12 Needs Improvement: 2
Changes proposed based on assessment results	None	None

PHIL 394	Functional Competency #1: Critical Analysis and Reasoning	Functional Competency #2: Written Communication
Course-specific goals linked to FC	Student provides reasons to question the premises of the author's argument; provides reasons to question whether the conclusion follows from the premises; makes clear some other problem with the argument – e.g. hidden assumption; and/or discusses ways the author might get around these criticisms.	Clarity of Writing, including clear organization and clarity of sentences.
How do you assess or measure achievement of those goals?	A rubric was used to assess their success in achieving this goal on Essay 3.	A rubric was used to assess their success in achieving this goal on Essay 3.
What did you find?	Very good: 11/26 Good: 7/26 Proficient: 6/26 Developing: 1/26 Novice: 1/26	Very good: 16/26 Good: 7/26 Proficient: 3/26 Developing: 0/26 Novice: 0/26
Changes proposed based on assessment results	Perhaps a quiz practicing this skill should be required. I do this in Introduction to Philosophy and find it very effective.	Perhaps more time in class devoted to writing skills would help.

Optional Section 6: Recommendations for Improving Assessment Processes

The Department significantly revised our Assessment Plan at the end of the previous assessment period (Spring 2013). This plan went into effect in Fall 2013. The Department has found our new Assessment Plan much more effective. Our goals are clearer and more easily instantiated in

specific courses, and other than our Senior Exit Survey, only direct measures are used. The data collected in the last two years has therefore been much more informative and useful in assessing our success and in guiding and measuring any changes we make.