

2016-2017
Department of Philosophy Student Learning Assessment Report

Planning Phase: Due to the Dean's Office by September 15

Department: Philosophy
Assessment Coordinator: Jessica Pfeifer

Department's Student Learning Objectives:

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.

Which SLO(s) is your department planning to assess this year?

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.

How do you plan to assess this objective? Remember you must include at least one direct measure in your plan.

In Spring 2017, the instructors in 400-level courses (not including independent studies) will use a rubric to grade the final essays of the students in their courses to assess how well the students achieve the department's Critical Analysis and Reasoning Learning Objective. The instructors will also collect information from the students about their philosophical background prior to enrolling in the course. In particular, the instructors will collect information how many Philosophy courses and at what level (100, 200, 300, 400-level) each of their students has taken. The data will then be analyzed to assess three issues. (1) It will provide an assessment of each course with respect to whether it is achieving this learning objective. (2) It will enable the Department to assess whether those nearing completion of the major are achieving this learning objective by looking at students who have taken 9 or more philosophy courses prior Spring 2017. This will provide an assessment of the Major as a whole with respect to this goal. (3) It will allow us to determine whether our prerequisites for these courses are adequate. In particular, the Department is interested in assessing whether success in achieving this central learning objective is strongly correlated with whether the students have taken one or two courses prior to enrolling in these 400-level courses, and whether it matters whether one of these two courses is at the 300-level.

Assessment Report (due July 1):

What was assessed?

In Spring 2017 all 400-level courses were assessed for how well students achieved learning objective 2 above. The goal was to assess three issues: (1) whether our 400-level courses are achieving competence with respect to this learning objective; (2) whether graduating senior philosophy majors are achieving competence with respect to this learning objective; (3) whether our prerequisites for our 400-level courses are adequate, in particular whether success in achieving this central learning objective is strongly correlated with whether the students have taken one or two courses prior to enrolling in these 400-level courses, and whether it matters whether one of these two courses is at the 300-level.

How was data collected? Which direct measures were used?

Faculty teaching 400-level courses in Spring 2017 used direct measures as outlined on the attached rubric to assess the Department's SLO 2. In particular, the faculty assessed student achievement on final essay assignments based on two criteria:

- **Understanding of the Material:** Does the student display an understanding of the arguments and other material related to the topic discussed in class?
- **Cogency of the Student's Argument(s):** Are the student's arguments well-reasoned? Does the student consider potential problems with their arguments and do a good job addressing these? Are there potential problems the student fails to address?

Data was collected for each individual in the courses and this was then matched by the Assessment Coordinator with how many philosophy courses each student had completed with a grade of C or higher prior to Spring 2017. (See the attached data.)

What were your findings?

With respect to question 1 (see attached data), 69.7% of the students in the 400-level courses were proficient or better in understanding the arguments and other material relevant to their final essay for the course, and 42.4% were rated as good (the highest rating); 78.8% of students were proficient or better and 42.4% were rated as good in being able to construct their own arguments and consider objections to these arguments. Our majors do even better, with 83.4% rated as proficient or better and 54% rated as good in understanding the arguments and other material relevant to their final essay for the course; 91.7% of our majors rated as proficient or better and 54.2% rated as good with developing their own arguments. Only 6% of the students rated unacceptable on these two criteria, all of whom were non-majors. In fact, the two who were rated unacceptable were both from one course, PHIL 484 (Kant's Theoretical Philosophy), which is a very difficult course. Moreover, given that understanding and constructing arguments is perhaps the main focus of philosophy courses, we have a very high standard for achievement in this regard. In light of this data, our 400-level courses seem to be doing a good job helping students achieve this learning objective.

With respect to question 2 (see attached data), the Department is doing an excellent job. 100% of graduating seniors achieved proficient or better on both measures, 72.7% achieved good on understanding arguments and other material relevant to their final essay, and 54.5% achieved a rating of good in constructing their own arguments, which includes considering objections to these arguments. From this it seems clear that by the time of graduation our majors are

successfully reaching this important goal.

With respect to question 3, the data make clear a number of relevant points. First, most students exceed the necessary prerequisites. Only one student (a non-major) had not taken a 300-level course prior to enrolling in a 400-level seminar, and that same student was the only one who had taken only 2 philosophy courses with a C or higher prior to taking a 400-level course, and only 4 (also non-majors) had taken only 3 courses with a C or higher. This makes clear that the Department is doing a good job advising majors to take 400-level courses only after getting sufficient background in other courses, unless those students are considered well prepared. All majors had 4 or more philosophy courses prior to taking a 400-level seminar, which included at least 2 300-level courses. Moreover, all of those with only 4 courses did well on both assessment measures, receiving a good on both. This indicates that the Department is only encouraging those majors faculty feel are competent to enroll in 400-level courses early in their career. Second, given that we only had one student who took no 300-level courses prior to enrolling in a 400-level seminar and that all students had at least 2 prior philosophy courses, we had insufficient data to determine whether taking 1 or 2 courses prior to enrolling in a 400-level course was correlated with achievement along these two assessment measures or whether it made a difference whether one of these courses was a 300-level course. Nevertheless, we did analyze the data (using Pearson's R) to determine whether the number of total courses taken prior to taking a 400-level course was positively correlated with achievement along these two measures and whether the number of 300-level courses made a difference. In particular, we considered whether taking 0,1, or 2 300-level courses was positively correlated with achievement along either measure. The data indicated a very weak positive correlation on both measures ($R=0.2806$ with respect to the students' ability to understanding arguments; $R=0.1923$ with respect to the students' ability to construct their own arguments), though neither was statistically significant at $p<0.10$ level. Moreover, the data indicated a stronger positive correlation on both measures with the number of courses taken (2, 3, or 4) with a C or better prior to enrolling in the 400-level seminar ($R=0.3365$ with respect to the students' ability to understanding arguments; $R=0.3093$ with respect to the students' ability to construct their own arguments), though this was also not statistically significant at $p<0.10$ level. Assuming that there is in fact a stronger positive correlation with the total number of courses taken, rather than with the number of 300-level courses (though the data is not conclusive in this regard), this indicates that requiring more than one 300-level course would not be advised. Moreover, the data is not sufficient for recommending the removal of the requirement of at least one 300-level course.

What preliminary suggestions is the Assessment Committee making to the department?

The Assessment Committee is recommending that the Department keep the prerequisites for 400-level courses as they are. All but one student and all philosophy majors are exceeding the current minimum prerequisites in any case, and there is not sufficient evidence that achievement with respect to this central learning objective is significantly positively correlated with an increase in the number of 300-level philosophy courses taken or the total number of courses taken (with a C or higher) prior to enrolling in a 400-level.

Interim Report (due March 15)

Based on the results of the assessment report and discussion within the faculty, what changes (if any) in the curriculum, assessment process or student learning objectives are being proposed?

Based on the results of the assessment report, the Department is recommending no changes to the curriculum, assessment process, or student learning objectives.

The learning objectives are central to all philosophy courses, and are essential to developing skills necessary for both majors and non-majors in developing critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. We also found the assessment process informative in answering the questions we proposed, and therefore are recommending no changes to the assessment process itself.

Moreover, based on the assessment results, the Department is proposing no changes to the curriculum. The assessment focused on SLO (2):

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.

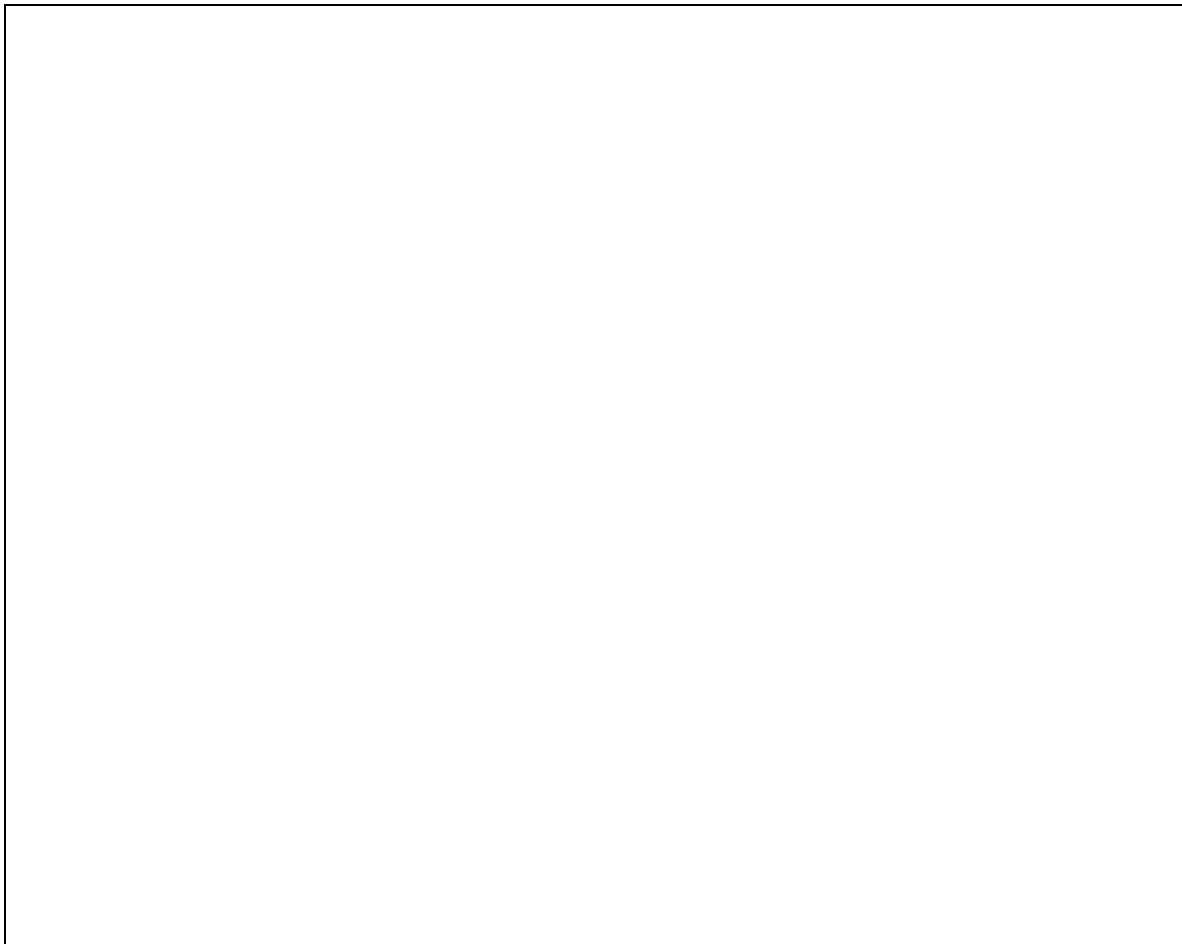
We assessed three issues: (1) whether our 400-level courses are achieving competence with respect to this learning objective; (2) whether graduating senior philosophy majors are achieving competence with respect to this learning objective; (3) whether our prerequisites for our 400-level courses are adequate, in particular whether success in achieving this central learning objective is strongly correlated with whether the students have taken one or two courses prior to enrolling in these 400-level courses, and whether it matters whether one of these two courses is at the 300-level.

Based on the results of the assessment, the Department is meeting its learning objectives in 400-level courses, and graduating senior majors in our 400-level courses do exceptionally well in this regard, indicating that the major as a whole is doing a good job at helping majors achieve this important learning objective. Therefore, no curricular changes are being proposed at this time based on these results. In addition, based on the results, the Department has decided to make no changes with respect to our 400-level prerequisites. All but one student and all philosophy majors are exceeding the current minimum prerequisites in any case, and there is not sufficient evidence that achievement with respect to this central learning objective is significantly positively correlated with an increase in the number of 300-level philosophy courses taken or the total number of courses taken (with a C or higher) prior to enrolling in a 400-level.

Planning Phase for assessment of changes (due September 15):

If your last assessment process did not result in substantial changes, please begin the process again.

If your last assessment report and departmental planning resulted in changes to your curriculum or assessment process, how are you planning on measuring the results of those changes?

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Assessment Report (due July 1):

What was assessed?

How was data collected? Which direct measures were used?

What were your findings?

What preliminary suggestions (if any) is the Assessment Committee making to the department?

Rubric for 400-level Course Assessment Spring 2017

	Good (90%)	Proficient (80%)	Developing, but Needs Some Work (70%)	Unacceptable (Below 70%)
<p>Understanding of the Material: Does the student display an understanding of the arguments and other material related to the topic discussed in class?</p>				
<p>Cogency of the Student's Argument(s): Are the student's arguments well-reasoned? Does the student consider potential problems with their arguments and do a good job addressing these? Are there potential problems the student fails to address?</p>				