Department of Philosophy
Assessment Plan for Undergraduate Majors
(Revised/Approved: Fall 2005)

1. Mission

A Philosophy major can prepare students for careers in many fields, including teaching, business, government, journalism, law, and medicine. The coursework emphasizes reasoning, seeing the big picture, and critically examining different views. The primary goal of instruction is to foster these skills, for such fundamental skills never go out of date. Undoubtedly, the most valuable aspect of a philosophical education is that through it students are able to deepen their understanding of reality, life, civilization and man, thereby increasing their ability to think for themselves in a clear and coherent fashion on all aspects of their experience.

2. Intended Student Outcome

Over the course of their majors students should become increasingly adept at the following:

1. Thinking objectively about issues and arguments, not being swayed by emotion and irrational personal preferences.

2. Thinking independently rather than primarily relying on others' opinions.

3. Developing open-mindedness, including understanding opposing views and appreciating the need for this understanding..

4. Recognizing the myriad ways that philosophical principles apply to everyday experiences and life, such as how ethical theories apply to contemporary social issues.

5. Cultivating critical and analytical thinking: penetrate deeply and critically into issues, rather than merely settling for a superficial understanding. Synthesize and contrast various abstract ideas.

6. Accepting both personal and social responsibility.

7. Acquiring a broad perception of the world and the interconnectedness of its inhabitants, including a basic understanding of major historical philosophical figures and themes.

8. Communicating clearly and succinctly both orally and in writing.

3. Assessment Method

Purpose

  The purpose is to increase students' consciousness of their own learning patterns, to track the progress of our majors, to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their work, and to set departmental goals for the future. The Philosophy faculty will use assessment as an instrument for a rigorous evaluation of curriculum, courses, instruction, and methods in relation to the needs of students, while in the program and following their graduation. Moreover, the results of the assessment will lead to the revision and fortification of the academic program for future students.

Methodology

A. Entry Level: Upon declaring Philosophy as his/her major, the student will

1. be required to take PHIL 105 (Introduction to Logic) if he/she has not already done so.

2. be required to submit a paper from a lower-level class for evaluation by the faculty.

3. be given a copy of this assessment plan so that they are aware of the process, and so as to lessen the burden on the advisor to re-explain the process.

The paper will be placed in the major's department file, normally held by the department advisor. Thus a portfolio/file will be assembled for each student containing the following materials:

1. Any material furnished by the Admissions office, and perhaps an initial DARS report.

2. One short paper or term paper (preferably unmarked) chosen by the student, written as a course assignment during his/her first year as a philosophy major. If a major does not submit a paper in a timely fashion, then a (clean) copy of one of their introductory papers may be made by any faculty member for inclusion in the file. Majors will be informed of this, and faculty members need to coordinate with each other to be sure that a copy is made, if necessary.

3. A very brief statement about the major's work and grade in PHIL 105 will be included in the file as soon as possible. A copy of the final exam for PHIL 105 should also ideally be included. This is the responsibility of the professor who taught PHIL 105 to the major. (Introduction to Logic is required for the major anyway.)

B. Exit Level: During his/her final year as Philosophy major, the following materials will be added to the portfolio:

1. One term paper chosen by the student, written as a course assignment during his/her senior year as a philosophy major. If a major does not submit a paper in a timely fashion, then a (clean) copy of one of their papers may be made by any faculty member for inclusion in the file.

2. Some brief comments from one or more faculty members on the overall work of the student as he/she nears graduation. The advisor will solicit comments from all faculty members, which can then be collected and put into the file (or typed up by the Office Assistant)

3. Any letters of recommendation for graduate school.

C. Alumni

1. The Department will give an exit questionnaire to the student shortly before gradation. If filled out and returned, the questionnaire will also be added to the portfolio and an additional copy will be kept on file in the department office.

2. Three years after graduation, the assessment file will be closed and kept on file.

4. Timeframe for Implementation

A. Although the primary responsibility for keeping and updating portfolios is the advisor's, all tenured and tenure-track faculty must participate in the assessment process. When students declare Philosophy as a major they will meet with their advisor who will explain the assessment process and will give the major a copy of this document.

B. By the end of each Spring semester, the department will meet to evaluate each portfolio and make sure that each file is as up to date as possible. Each faculty member should look over each file.

C. Faculty members will discuss and keep a record of any results which arise, such as clear strengths and weaknesses in students' work and ways that we can improve our program and/or curriculum.

 D. The process will be repeated each year, beginning in the Fall 2006, with all new students declaring philosophy as a major.

5. Analysis and Results

Faculty members will evaluate majors'portfolios each spring according to the following four criteria, to the extent possible given the major's stage in the program.

1. Critical thinking skills (see student outcome #'s 1, 2, 3 & 5)
2. Communication skills (# 8)

3. Ethical analysis (# 4, 6)
4. Historical (or 'base') knowledge (# 7)

Faculty members will also rate the student as to whether or not the student has achieved the following three stages of development:

Stage #1: Knowledge of basic logic and philosophical terms. Basic knowledge of major philosophical issues.

Stage #2: Increased ability to reason about philosophical problems. Increased ability to understand and critically reason about philosophical writings. Adequate communication skills.

Stage #3: Demonstrated knowledge of major historical figures, and advanced critical thinking skills. A reflective problem solver who has achieved the student outcomes listed at the beginning of this document. More advanced ability to communicate clearly both orally and in writing.

 To the extent possible, such results should be quantified, charted, and/or numerically rated so that students can be compared to each other and, more importantly, so that individual student progress can be more clearly tracked and measured.