

## **Philosophy Major Assessment Plan**

At this time we offer an assessment plan for the philosophy major. In due course, we will also offer assessment plans for the proposed new interdisciplinary majors in Religious Studies and in Classical Studies (both are now in development).

The philosophy major supports the goals of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences by fostering analytical rigor in philosophical analysis; providing an historical perspective that leads to a deeper understanding of social, political, ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical issues; inculcating critical reading and thinking skills; promoting ethical reasoning; and improving students' overall ability to cogently articulate arguments for and against philosophical positions both orally and in writing.

### **Learning Outcomes for Philosophy**

Students who successfully complete the philosophy major at TCNJ will be able to:

- 1) explain central concepts, terms, distinctions, questions, arguments, and theories in (a) ethics, (b) epistemology, and (c) metaphysics;
- 2) explain the distinction between valid and invalid arguments, and be able (where appropriate) to translate segments of the natural language into symbolic form and to construct proofs;
- 3) explain central questions, arguments, theories, and movements in the history of philosophy, including ancient, modern, and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy;
- 4) identify, interpret, and develop a sustained critique of arguments, theories and positions in philosophical works;
- 5) articulate multiple points of view on philosophical questions demonstrating an understanding of their respective virtues, deficiencies, and implications;
- 6) formulate their own philosophical positions clearly and cogently while demonstrating a firm grasp of opposing positions and objections;

- 7) argue clearly and cogently, orally and in writing, both for positions and against alternatives;
- 8) undertake philosophical research through the appropriate use of primary and secondary texts;
- 9) demonstrate knowledge of how work in philosophy has proceeded in one or more of the following areas: aesthetics, environmental ethics, philosophy of language, philosophy of law, philosophy of mind, bioethics, medical ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of science, and philosophy of religion.

## **Assessment Methods**

The assessment plan for philosophy relies on both direct and indirect measures of student learning. For each of our nine learning outcomes, a direct measure of assessment or an indirect measure of assessment or both will be developed. Direct methods evaluate student work products against agreed upon rubrics for selected learning goals. Indirect methods involve surveys, questionnaires, and self-evaluation essays in which students report their perceptions about how well the courses in the major helped them to achieve still other learning goals. In the case of many learning outcomes, a combination of both direct and indirect measures of assessment will be appropriate.

After examining several models for assessing learning outcomes in the humanities, and researching what other philosophy departments have chosen as their assessment methods, the philosophy faculty has decided to adopt the following specific measures of direct and indirect assessment.

1. Course-based learning assessments based on graded course assignments for selected courses. Course-based learning assessments will be determined by reference to one or more rubrics which will be finalized by the philosophy faculty during the 2012/2013 academic year and is attached in draft form. See Attachment A hereto ("Common Rubric for Assessment of Learning Objectives for the Philosophy Major at The College of New Jersey"). We intend to employ SOCS at such time as SOCS, or successor learning management software, becomes available to us for this purpose to assess student assignments against our agreed-upon rubrics for the purpose of determining progress toward selected learning outcomes. Prior to that time, assessments will be accomplished manually.

Progress toward attaining learning outcomes by majors in selected courses will be assessed by application of the assessment rubric by individual faculty members when they do their regular grading of student assignments.

Instructors will select at least one written assignment from each declared major in each course to use as the basis for their assessment. This assignment will normally include the term paper or final essay exam for the course. The exception is logic (PHL 120/PHL 220) for which instructors will select one or more in-class, problem-oriented exams to use as a basis for assessing progress toward learning outcomes.

Not all learning outcomes will be assessed for every course. See Table 1 below ("Objectives by Course"). For example, ethics courses will not be assessed against learning outcomes pertaining to history of philosophy.

Moreover, Learning Outcome 9 is designed to be applied as relevant to specialized courses exploring how philosophy develops in related areas. When assessing progress toward this learning outcome, instructors will only assess the extent to which student learning has been achieved in the particular related area.

Finally, not all learning outcomes will be exclusively assessed using rubrics. Some learning outcomes, accordingly, will be assessed by other measures as well. See Table 2 below ("Summary of Assessment Plan"). With the exception of the senior capstones, nor will all courses necessarily be selected for assessment by this measure every year. Rather, courses may be rotated on a multi-year basis.

Table 1 below correlates learning outcomes to be assessed against major courses and electives. (Asterisks indicate major requirements.)

PHL 100/HON 203: LO1a or 1b or 1c or 3; and 4-7

PHL 120/220\*: LO2

PHL 135\*: LO1a and 4-7

PHL 201\*: LO2-8

PHL 205\*: LO2-8

PHL 215: LO2 and 4-9

PHL 240: LO2 and 4-9

PHL 245/HON 245: LO2 and 4-9

PHL 246: LO2 and 4-9

PHL 250/HON 272: LO2 and 4-9

PHL 255/HON 355: 1-7, 9

PHL 265/HON 265: LO2 and 4-9

PHL 275: LO2 and 4-9

PHL 306\*: LO2-8

PHL 311: LO1b and 2 and 4-9

PHL 347/HON 346: LO2 and 4-9

PHL 350\*: LO1a and 2 and 4-8

PHL 370: variable

PHL 375\*: LO1a and 2 and 4-8

PHL 391: variable

PHL 410\*: LO1b and 2 and 4-8

PHL 420\*: LO1c and 2 and 4-9

PHL 421\*: LO1c and 2 and 4-9

PHL 422\*: LO1c and 2 and 4-9

PHL 430\*: LO1a and 2 and 4-8

PHL 470\*: variable

PHL 493, 494, 495, 496: LO1a or 1b or 1c or 3 or 9; 2 and 4-8

Table 1: Objectives by Course

Applying the relevant rubrics, instructors will assess progress toward each learning outcome based on a scale in which NA represents "not relevant or no opportunity to observe," 0 represents "not at all," 1 represents "at a basic level" or "benchmark," 2 represents "at an intermediate level" or "milestone," and 3 represents at "an advanced level" or "capstone level." Accordingly, if the course is introductory level, the goal would be for all or most of the selected assignments to be accorded a score of "1"; where a significant number of scores are below 1, the judgment will be that the particular learning goal will not have been achieved for that course, and where a significant number of scores are above 1, the judgment will be that students have exceeded expectations for that learning goal in that course. At the intermediate (200) level, the goal is for all or most assignments to achieve a score of "2." At the advanced (300 and 400) level, the goal is for all or most assignments to achieve a score of "3." Thus information collected by use of the rubrics will be evaluated to insure that the test for success in upper-level courses is more stringent than in lower-level courses. Rubrics will contain descriptions of what kinds of evidence supports each particular level of attainment. One possible model for the Department's assessment rubrics is the American Association of Colleges and Universities [VALUE](#) (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) templates.

The assessment scores for each assignment will be anonymous and aggregated and sorted by class to determine whether students are progressing from one year to the next through the program in their attainment of the learning outcomes for the philosophy major. Data will be reviewed annually in order to determine whether any changes in the course pedagogy or curriculum are needed.

As appropriate, rubrics may reflect consolidated outcomes in some cases. For example, outcomes 4, 5 and 7 overlap to a substantial degree, and in no case do we propose to assess any one of these three outcomes without assessing the other two as well. At the same time, it is appropriate that they be listed separately as learning outcomes since they are pedagogically distinct. For purposes of assessment, however, the virtues of simplicity and efficiency may warrant their combination.

It is recognized that grading and assessment represent two distinct types of evaluations. Thus, the 100-level essay exam may receive a grade of "A" but (as described above) nonetheless be appropriately assessed as a "1" on a scale of "0" to "3," where "1" represents achievement at a baseline, or

benchmark, level and indicates that the particular learning outcome for a course at that level has been achieved.

To insure the integrity of the assessment process, assessment rubrics together with copies of the works assessed shall be kept on file and made available for review organized by year, term and course. A numerical report will be prepared at the end of each academic year for each assessed course and delivered to the department and to other parties as required.

To insure that learning objectives are being met and that deficiencies, if any, revealed in the assessment process are brought to the attention of the department in a timely fashion, the instructor shall review the assessment results and report any deficiencies to the department on a regular basis and (where applicable) at least once per year.

Last, as indicated in Table 2 below (Summary of Assessment Plan), to insure the feasibility of the assessment process, the number of courses assessed on an annual basis will be limited. At the same time, the department will insure that assessments are completed for each Learning Objective and, where reasonable, at a baseline, or benchmark, level, at an intermediate level and at a capstone level. Thus, some Learning Objectives will be assessed by reference to courses taught only on either an annual or a biannual schedule. Such a teaching schedule creates a natural rotation for the assessment of those courses. (PHL 350, 375, 410 and 420 fall into this category.) Still other Learning Objectives will be assessed by reference to a single course per year to be designated by the department prior to the term in which the course is to be taught. (The asterisked note following Table 2 below explains this latter method.)

To further insure the feasibility of the process, only courses taught by regular faculty members will be assessed.

2. Senior Capstone Assessment. All philosophy majors must complete a senior capstone requirement that consists of either a senior thesis or a senior project. The senior project consists of two half-unit courses, PHL 493 and PHL 494, while the senior thesis consists of two full unit courses, PHL 495 and PHL 496. The work products for both of these capstone course sequences are usually scholarly essays written by the student working with a faculty mentor that address a significant philosophical issue or which examine philosophical works from an historical perspective. All senior capstone essays will be assessed as to the extent to which they exemplify the kinds of knowledge and skills that the philosophy major seeks to impart to our

majors. In the case of honors theses, these capstone assessments will be conducted by at least two members of the faculty and will also include an oral examination in which the student must defend his or her thesis or project.

Capstone projects and theses will be assessed on a subjective basis by means of a brief report from the advisor, or, in the case of honors theses, the committee, regarding the extent to which the capstone project or thesis shows that relevant learning objectives have been met.

3. Student Self-Assessments. As indirect methods we intend to employ the results of student self-assessment questionnaires for both (a) entering freshmen and internal and external transfers into the philosophy major and (b) graduating seniors. (a) Self-assessment questionnaires will involve a series of questions exploring the entering student's motivation for studying philosophy and his or her understanding of selected central topics and concepts in the major fields of philosophy. Results will be used to determine (1) how well entering students understand philosophy at the time they enter the major and, specifically, how close they are to achieving selected learning outcomes, and (2) their expectations with respect to the major. Results will be compared on a year-over-year basis and also against results obtained from the senior level questionnaire. (b) A second, level-appropriate self-assessment questionnaire will be administered to graduating students. The results of that questionnaire will be used to determine (i) the degree of confidence seniors display in their own understanding of philosophy at the time they leave the major and their capacity to extend that understanding through further research and into new areas, and, specifically, whether they consider themselves to have achieved the learning outcomes, and (ii) whether their expectations in respect of the philosophy major have been satisfied. We will also query (iii) their specific plans for the coming two-three years after graduation (will they be attending law school? Graduate school? Working? If so, where?). Results will be compared on a year-over-year basis and also against results obtained from the entering student questionnaire.

4. Alumni Surveys. In addition to these direct and indirect methods for assessing the impacts of the philosophy major on our students, we will also administer an online survey of our alumni at intervals of 2, 5 and 10 years after graduation. This assessment tool will help us determine the extent to which our graduates believe that their undergraduate major in philosophy has helped to prepare them to pursue their career objectives. It will also enable us to determine the work and education our alumni pursued after graduation. Information from these surveys will be used to prepare current

students to formulate their own career goals and to educate prospective philosophy majors on the value and benefits of an undergraduate major in philosophy. The alumni surveys are not primarily intended to assess learning outcomes but rather to aid the department in career mentoring and advisement. If response rates to our requests to complete alumni surveys is low, this method will be supplemented by alumni phone interviews.

The assessment plan is summed up in Table 2 below ("Summary of Assessment Plan").



<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Assessment Method</b>	<b>Learning Goal</b>	<b>Locus of Assessment</b>	<b>Inquiries Beyond Satisfaction of Learning Goals</b>
Annually	Course-based (rubric applied to final paper or final essay exam for the course)	#1a (Ethics)  #1b (Epistemology)  #1c (Metaphysics)	PHL 135, 350, 375  PHL 100, 410 PHL 100, 420	NA  NA  NA
Annually	" "	#2 (Logic)	PHL 120	NA
Annually	" "	#3 (History)	PHL 201, 205	NA
Annually	" "	#4-7	100- or 200-level course*; PHL 493-496	NA
Annually	" "	#8	100- or 200-level course*; PHL 493-496	NA
Annually	" "	#9	200-, 300- or 400-level course*	NA
Annually	Capstone advisor (or committee) qualitative reports	#1-9	PHL 493-496	NA
Annually	Entry self-assessment (lower-level questionnaire)	May survey regarding #1-9	Invitation	Expectations for major; reasons for declaring major
Annually	Exit self-assessment (upper-level questionnaire)	#1-9	Invitation	Satisfaction with major; plans for graduate school, law school, work; acceptances
Annually, targeting respondents 2, 5 and 10 years after graduation	Alumnae survey	May survey regarding any of #1-9	Correspondence; supplemented by phone	Post-graduate education; current employment

\*In the cases of Learning Objectives 4-9, the department will designate approximately one course at the indicated level per year that be assessed (using, as for each of the Learning Objectives, the common rubric) for satisfaction of the relevant Learning Objective. For example, in a given year, one of PHL 255, 326 and 422 might be selected for purposes of determining satisfaction of Learning Objectives 4-7; one of PHL 493 and 494 might be selected for purposes of determining satisfaction of Learning Objective 8; and one of PHL 250, 275, 311 and 347 might be selected for purposes of determining satisfaction of Learning Objective 9.

Table 2: Summary of Assessment Plan

The Department's Strategic Plan and its Implementation Plan have been separately filed.

The Department of Philosophy, Religion and Classical Studies  
Revised and resubmitted December 10, 2012

Attachment A: Common Rubric for Assessment of Program Learning Objectives for the Philosophy Major at The College of New Jersey (Revised 2013.04.16)

Course title and number: \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_ Term: \_\_\_\_\_

Major no. \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ majors in course      Nature of assignment (including length): \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

Grading scale: 0-3, where 0 means “not at all; no or little evidence of learning objective being satisfied”; 1 means “at a beginning or rudimentary level, with performance serving as benchmark for future work”; 2 means “at an intermediate level, with performance marking a significant milestone in progress toward objective”; 3 means “at an advanced or capstone level, with performance demonstrating that the student has substantially met the indicated objective.”

Specifically: 1 (“benchmark”) means that the program objective (not course) is at least partially satisfied but in a sketchy and incomplete way. This score, depending on the relevant LO, indicates that the assignment displays one or more of the following features: the student makes an attempt to articulate important concepts, positions and issues in ethics, epistemology or metaphysics but discussion may lack clarity (LO1); student appears to grasp the concept of validity but may not be aware of its importance in the discussion (LO2); student has a rudimentary understanding of important aspects of the history of philosophy (LO3); student will make some effort to identify and explore implications of the positions he or she is exploring but may fail to attend still other implications and appear to be unaware of important elements of a full critique, including deficiencies in the position under scrutiny or the availability and potential relevance of competing positions (LO4, LO5 and LO7); student is beginning the attempt to articulate his or her own positions (LO6); student is beginning to use primary and secondary materials in appropriate ways (LO8); student shows some evidence of understanding how philosophy may develop in related areas (LO9).

2 (“milestone”) means the assignment demonstrates substantial progress toward the program objective. This score, depending on the relevant LO, indicates that the assignment displays one or more of the following features: the student can clearly articulate important concepts, positions and issues in ethics, epistemology or metaphysics (LO1); student grasps and can use concept of validity (LO2); student evidences a clear understanding and appreciation of important theories in the history of philosophy (LO3); student identifies and explores at least some important implications of the positions he or she is exploring and engages in (if not complete) a relevant critical discussion, including a discussion of deficiencies in the position under scrutiny or the availability and potential relevance of competing positions (LO4, LO5 and LO7); student’s own views are carefully considered and clearly articulated and student understands the importance of exploring objections to those views (LO6); student makes substantial use of primary and secondary materials (LO8); and student shows an understanding of how philosophy may develop in related areas (LO9).

3 (“capstone” or capstone-level) means student has substantially met the program objective. This score, depending on the relevant LO, indicates that the assignment displays one or more of the following features: the student clearly articulates important concepts, positions and issues in ethics, epistemology or metaphysics (LO1); the student has a firm grasp of validity and how that concept is to be used in philosophical analysis (LO2); student evidences a clear understanding and appreciation of important theories in the history of philosophy and how leading figures develop positions that serve to critique and also to respond to the work of their predecessors (LO3); the student identifies and explores most important implications of the positions he or she is exploring and substantially completes a relevant critical discussion, including discussion of deficiencies of the position under scrutiny or the availability and potential relevance of competing positions (LO4, LO5 and LO7); student’s own views are considered, clearly articulated and student fully develops and defends against interesting objections (LO6); student is using primary and second materials in fully appropriate ways (LO8); and student shows a full understanding and appreciation of how philosophy may develop in related areas (LO9).

Not Applicable (NA) signifies that the course is excluded for assessment for the indicated learning objective. See Assessment Plan.

The asterisk (\*) signifies that the course may be included for assessment for the indicated learning objective. At least one course will be identified each term for the purpose of assessing specified learning objectives, with the selection of such a course being made in a way that will insure the regular assessment of all learning objectives not assessed within the context of a course specifically dedicated to the assessment of particular learning objectives. The inclusion of a given course for that purpose will generally be determined, together with the specific objectives the course will be assessed for, prior to the term in which the course is offered. See Assessment Plan.

A copy of the work assessed (e.g., student paper or exam) should be attached to the completed rubric.

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<sup>1</sup> Courses not currently assessed via this rubric include: PHL 220; 306; 311; 347; 421; 422; 493-496.

<sup>2</sup> Distributions indicated below serve only as a rough guideline of what constitutes success; a meaningful evaluation can be obtained only by a comparison of data on a year-over-year basis.