

Summary Assessment Report  
Philosophy  
November 2014

## Assessment Plan

The Assessment Plan for the program in philosophy, approved in April 2013, provides for quantitative (rubric-based) evaluations of significant assignments in designated courses by full-time faculty members in philosophy, for qualitative (discursive) evaluations of capstone projects by those same individuals and for a web-based evaluation of the program by graduating senior majors. In all cases, assessments are meant to evaluate student progress toward the Learning Objectives established for the program in philosophy. Those Learning Objectives are summarized in Attachment A hereto.

Pursuant to that plan, the following assessments were conducted:

1. Qualitative evaluations/capstone theses and projects. These qualitative (discursive) evaluations were prepared in each case by the advisor on the senior capstone. The total number of philosophy majors completing capstones spring 2014 was 13 (2013: 4). The form for the capstone evaluation is included in Attachment A hereto.
2. Quantitative evaluations. These quantitative (rubric-based) evaluations were completed for selected assignments completed by philosophy majors in selected courses. The total number of assessed assignments for philosophy majors enrolled in those sections during the academic year 2013-2014 was 67. The rubric is included in Attachment A hereto.
3. Senior survey. This survey was distributed to graduating majors in early May with a reminder to them in early June. Of the 13 seniors who actually graduated in the spring, 6 responded to some questions and 7 to others (2013: 6 and 3). The purpose of the survey was to determine the extent to which graduating majors considered themselves to have met the program's learning objectives.
4. Entering major survey. This survey was distributed to philosophy majors planning to matriculate at the College in September 2014. Of the 9 students surveyed, 4 students responded. The purpose of the survey was to help the faculty understand what new majors expect of the program.

A Confidential Assessment Report was filed with LOAC in October 2014. This Summary Assessment Report, which has been prepared on the basis of that report and will be filed with LOAC shortly, summarizes key aspects of the confidential report but insures that specific individual assessments cannot be related to the work of any given student.

## 1. Qualitative evaluations/capstone projects and theses

Thirteen capstone projects or theses were assessed. These thirteen capstone papers were complete as of the time of assessment (May 2014); other projects may have been completed later in the summer. Topics included: the nonidentity problem, Hilbert's philosophical program, Heidegger's ethics, issues in pharmacology, the morality of animal experimentation, experimental ethics, death and the meaning of life, prison as torture, pop culture and philosophy, restorative justice from a feminist theoretical perspective, human evolution and moral principle, ethics of pediatric neuroenhancement and the use of drug courts in place of incarceration.

The capstones were in most cases described as meeting the relevant learning objectives and were described by faculty in generally positive terms. Thus faculty in many cases indicated that the work clearly satisfied relevant learning objectives. In one case, a faculty member noted that the paper is "now under consideration by a professional journal [and represents] work one might expect of a doctoral student." Another faculty member wrote that the work "more than satisfactorily demonstrated a very high level of success." Still another wrote that the student had shown an "impressive ability to integrate content and skills [in philosophy] with learning as a pre-med student." Still another described a student's work as "nuanced [and demonstrating a] firm grasp of the literature." Finally: "a fitting capstone experience."

Significant negatives were recorded for one paper, with a faculty member reporting that the "final paper is rather undeveloped and the argument not tightly drawn." In another case, the faculty member noted that had there been "time to write another draft, the final paper could have been stronger."

The Confidential Assessment Report includes as an attachment a list of the 13 students (arranged by name of the faculty advisor) completing the capstone in May 2014. It also includes, also as an attachment, the 13 completed qualitative assessments. The assessed capstones themselves are on file in the office of the Department of Philosophy, Religion and Classical Studies (see Assessment 2014).

## 2. Quantitative evaluations

Assessments were completed for the designated assignments in Introduction to Logic (PHL 120), Contemporary Moral Issues (PHL 135), Ancient Philosophy (PHL 201), Modern Philosophy (PHL 205), Law and Ethics (PHL 375), Metaphysics (PHL 420) and Aesthetics (PHL 246). The assessments were in each case rubric-based and limited to philosophy majors.

Introduction to Logic, Ancient Philosophy, Modern Philosophy, Law and Ethics and Metaphysics are required for the major (Law and Ethics as part of a disjunctive

requirement with Ethical Theory, and Metaphysics as part of a disjunctive requirement with Theory of Knowledge) and hence specified in the Assessment Plan as subject to assessment on every occasion they are taught. Contemporary Moral Issues is assessed to provide diversity in the levels of the courses assessed. The Assessment Plan also requires designation of a “floater” course for assessment purposes each term or at least each academic year. Aesthetics, taught in spring 2014, was the designated floater for the year.

Introduction to Logic. Rubrics were completed in connection with Introduction to Logic (fall 2013) for 3 philosophy majors. The assessed assignment was the final evaluation for the course (a fourth exam building on work done earlier in the term). The designated learning objective for the course is the ability to distinguish between valid and invalid arguments (LO2), and a mark of “2” indicates satisfactory progress in the course. As to LO2, one assignment received a mark of “2” and the remaining two assignments both received marks of “1” (indicating that a benchmark was satisfied but only in a sketchy or incomplete way).

Contemporary Moral Issues. Rubrics were completed in connection with Contemporary Moral Issues (fall 2013) for the only philosophy major in the course. The assessed assignment was the final paper for the course. The designated learning objectives for the course include an ability to explain central concepts, questions, arguments and theories in ethics (LO1a) and the ability to develop critiques, develop positions and engage in research (LO5-8). In each case, a mark of “1” indicates satisfactory progress (all that is expected at this introductory level is the achievement of the benchmark if only in a sketchy or incomplete way. As to all learning objectives for this course, the assignment received the mark of “1.”

Ancient Philosophy. Rubrics were completed in connection with Ancient Philosophy for 12 students. The assessed assignment was the term paper for the course. The designated learning objectives for the course include the ability to explain central questions, arguments, theories and moments in the history of philosophy (LO3) and (optionally) the ability to develop critiques, develop positions and engage in research (LO 5-8). A mark of “3” indicates satisfactory progress in the achievement of LO3, while a mark of 2 indicates satisfactory progress in the achievement of LO 5-8. In this instance, only LO3 was evaluated. As to LO3, 6 assignments received a mark of “1,” indicating the assignments fell significantly short of expectations; 2 assignments received a mark of “2,” indicating the assignments showed progress but still did not meet expectations; and 4 assignments received a mark of “3,” indicating satisfactory progress.

Modern Philosophy. Rubrics were completed in connection with Modern Philosophy for 9 students. The assessed assignment was the final exam for the course. The

designated learning objectives for the course include the ability to explain central questions, arguments, theories and moments in the history of philosophy (LO3) and (optionally) the ability to develop critiques, develop positions and engage in research (LO 5-8). A mark of “3” indicates satisfactory progress in the achievement of LO3, while a mark of 2 indicates satisfactory progress in the achievement of LO 5-8. All objectives were evaluated. As to LO3, 1 assignment received a mark of “0,” indicating that no material progress toward the program objective has been achieved; 1 assignment received the mark of “1,” indicating the assignments fell significantly short of expectations; 2 assignments received a mark of “2,” indicating the assignments showed progress but still did not meet expectations; and 5 assignments received a mark of “3,” indicating satisfactory progress.

Law and Ethics. Rubrics were completed in connection with Law and Ethics for 16 students. The assessed assignment was the final paper for the course. Learning objectives for Law and Ethics include the ability to explain central concepts, questions, arguments and theories in ethics (LO1a) and the demonstration of knowledge of how philosophy proceeds in one or more related area (here, law)(LO9). For this particular course and as to LO1a, it is indicated in the rubric that a mark of “3” represents satisfactory progress. As to LO9, a mark of “2” represents satisfactory progress. As to LO1a, 2 assignments were marked “1,” indicating that the assignments feel significantly short of expectations; 5 assignments were marked “2,” indicating that the assignments showed progress but still did not meet expectations; and 8 were marked “3,” indicating satisfactory progress. As to LO9, 1 assignment was marked “1,” 1 assignment was marked “2”; and 14 assignments were marked “3.”

Metaphysics. Rubrics were completed in connection with Metaphysics for 17 students. The assessed assignment was the final paper for the course. Learning objectives for Metaphysics include the ability to explain central concepts, questions, arguments and theories and metaphysics (LO1c). For this course, a mark of “3” – work at effectively the capstone level – represents satisfactory progress. As to LO1c, 3 assignments were marked “0,” indicating that no material progress toward the program objective has been achieved; 5 assignments were marked “1,” indicating that the assignments feel significantly short of expectations; 4 assignments were marked “2,” indicating that the assignments showed progress but still did not meet expectations; and 5 assignments were marked “3,” indicating satisfactory progress.

Aesthetics. Rubrics were completed in connection with Aesthetics for 9 students. Learning objectives for Aesthetics include the ability to develop critiques and explore alternative points of view (LO4, 5 and 7); the ability to develop one's own position (LO 6); the ability to undertake research (LO7); research ability (LO8); and a demonstration of how philosophy proceeds in one or more related areas and disciplines (LO9). For this course, a mark of "2" indicates satisfactory progress as to LO 4-8 and a mark of "3" indicates satisfactory progress as to LO9. As to LO 4-7, all 9 assignments were marked as 2 or 3 indicating, for each of the 9, satisfactory progress. As to LO8, 1 assignment was marked "1," indicating that the assignment fell significantly short of expectations; all other assignments were marked as "2" or "3," indicating, for each of those assignments, satisfactory progress. As to LO9, 1 assignment was marked "1," indicating that the assignment fell significantly short of expectations; 4 assignments were marked "2," indicating that assignments showed progress but still did not meet expectations; and 4 assignments were marked "3," indicating satisfactory progress.

The Confidential Assessment Report includes as an attachment all completed rubrics. The assessed assignments themselves are on file in the office of the Department of Philosophy, Religion and Classical Studies (see files marked Assessment 2014).

### 3. Senior survey

Six of thirteen seniors completed the senior survey (2013: three of six). One additional senior answered some substantive questions but did not provide profile information. Responses from 2013 and from 2014 are combined for purposes of this report, bringing the total number of responses to ten (with nine sets of complete responses).

Evaluations of their progress toward the program's learning objectives are summed up as follows:

History (ancient and modern): Eight students indicated that they believed themselves to have gained a comprehensive understanding of ancient; one student was neutral; one student disagreed. All ten students indicated that they believed themselves to have gained a comprehensive understanding of modern.

Contemporary philosophy: Nine students indicated that they believed themselves to have gained a comprehensive understanding of contemporary philosophy; one student was neutral.

Logic: All ten students indicated on one of the three metrics ("Philosophical Argumentation") that they believed themselves to have developed rigor and precision; nine students indicated on the second of the three metrics ("Critical

Thinking”) that they believed themselves to have developed rigor and precision; one student was neutral. On the third metric (“Formal Logic”), five students indicated that they believed themselves to have developed rigor and precision and five students were neutral.

Cogent argumentation; ability to argue clearly and cogently for and against philosophical positions: nine students indicated they believed themselves to have developed the relevant skills; one student was neutral.

Ethics: Nine students indicated that they believed they had obtained a good understanding of ethics; one was neutral. All ten students indicated that they believed they had obtained a good understanding of applied ethics and of ethical theory; seven students indicated that they believed they had obtained a good understanding of “advanced topics in ethics” and three were neutral.

Epistemology: Six students indicated that they believed they had obtained a good understanding of epistemology; three were neutral; one was negative.

Metaphysics: Seven students indicated that they believed they had obtained a good understanding of metaphysics; three were neutral.

Formulate own positions: All ten students indicated that they believed themselves to have gained that ability.

Research: Nine students indicated that they believed themselves to have gained the ability to conduct research; one was neutral.

Subfields: As to where students had obtained an understanding of aesthetics, five students agreed and five were neutral. As to environmental ethics, four agreed; five were neutral; one was negative. As to philosophy of language, six agreed and four were neutral. As to philosophy of law, six agreed, three were neutral and one was negative. As to philosophy of mind, five agreed, 4 were neutral and one was negative. As to bioethics, five agreed and five were neutral. As to political philosophy, 2 agreed and 8 were neutral. As to philosophy of science, seven agreed, two were neutral and one was negative. As to philosophy of religion, six agreed, three were neutral and one was negative.

Interdisciplinarity: Nine students indicated that they believed they had been provided the opportunity to explore interdisciplinary issues in the humanities; one was neutral. As to the social sciences, all ten were positive. As to other schools, six students agreed and four were neutral.

Advising and mentoring: As to advising on major requirements and programs of study, all ten students were positive. As to career planning, seven students were positive and three were neutral. As to referrals on academic concerns, eight were positive and two neutral. As to the capstone, all ten students were positive. As to

graduate and law school advising, the responses were evenly split between positive and neutral.

Several other questions were asked, relating to e.g. honors awards and plans after graduation.

A summative question was whether the students overall were satisfied with their choice of major. Nine indicated they were “very satisfied,” one indicated “satisfied.”

Finally, students were asked for any additional comments or suggestions they might have regarding the philosophy major.

The Confidential Assessment Report includes as an attachment the senior survey and all responses.

4. Entering major survey. This survey was distributed for the first time summer 2014. The purpose of the survey was to help the faculty understand what new majors expect of the program.

The Confidential Assessment Report includes as an attachment the entering major survey and all responses.



## Conclusions

1. As we were last year, we are, in general, pleased with the results of assessment. Students are making substantial progress toward achieving the learning objectives established by the department for program. This fact is demonstrated by both the qualitative assessments of the capstones and the rubric-based assessments of the work of individual majors in particular courses. Moreover, it is gratifying that the students' responses in the senior survey are positive.
2. We considered rewording some aspects of the survey but declined to do so, in part because any material change in the survey would discredit its year over year results. Nonetheless, ongoing questions include:
  - a. When students indicate that they are neutral on a certain question, it is unclear whether they are saying that their evaluation is "neither positive nor negative" or alternatively that they are not part of the relevant subgroup. Thus, students who have never been interested in pursuing graduate work in philosophy may rate their advising experience as neutral even though the better answer might simply be "not applicable."
  - b. We need to consider whether the phrase "formal logic" should be replaced by a term more meaningful to both students and faculty; moreover, it would be useful to isolate whether students' uncertainty is related to their experiences in our main logic course or to their experiences across the curriculum.
  - c. To clarify how the students perceive whether they have achieved a "good understanding" in the areas of "epistemology or metaphysics," we may need to consider bifurcating the question so that the relevant cohort of students would provide the assessment.
  - d. The language of the survey alone for a third year for the reasons indicated above. At that time, changes will be considered.
  - e. For this coming year, we will work to bring it about that proportionally more seniors respond to the senior survey.
3. As noted last year, we need to consider adding a rubric-based assessment for the capstones. The qualitative evaluations are very useful but comparisons from one student to the other, and from one year to the next, are difficult.
4. Qualitative (discursive) assessments of senior capstone papers and theses were generally positive. However, significant negatives were recorded in one case and tepid responses in still another. In general, students seem to be performing either at a very high level or a lower-than-desirable level with little in between. We regard it as important, going forward, to be alert to situations in which students seem to be having difficulty getting started on their capstone projects and begin intensified efforts to help them early in the process. For such

students, we can also remind them that it is acceptable and even desirable to ground their capstone paper in their own earlier work.

5. Quantitative (rubric-based) assessments were generally positive. However, there were some isolated areas of concern. Specifically, the quantitative (rubric-based) assessment of Ancient Philosophy (PHL 201) suggests that several students had failed to meet the assessed learning objective (become “able to explain central questions, arguments, theories, and moments in the history of philosophy”) in some “substantial” way. This situation was discussed and considered not to be systemic but progress will be closely monitored going forward.
6. Student responses to queries relating to our core learning objectives to indicate high degree of confidence across the board.
7. While the numbers may be simply a reflection of the fact that so few students completed the senior survey, we would like to see concrete evidence of more students applying to and being accepted by graduate or professional schools.

MR 2014.11.28

Revised 2015.02.11

## Attachment A

### **Learning Outcomes for Philosophy, Model Rubric and Capstone Assessment Form**

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.

Philosophy Major Capstone Assessment Form  
The College of New Jersey

Course title and number: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

Term: \_\_\_\_\_

Student no. \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ majors completing capstone with this instructor

Please write a brief report assessing the capstone thesis or project against any applicable program learning objectives 1-9.<sup>1</sup> Work should be assessed when the student concludes both the research and writing components of the thesis or project (normally, in late April or early May of the student's senior year). Please include the student's name and the name of the paper and say whether the paper is a senior project or thesis. Please, also, say enough about the topic so that the evaluation isn't completed in the abstract but rather is tied into the specific project and an independent reader can understand why the evaluation came out as it did.

---

<sup>1</sup> Per Assessment Plan: "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."

Common Rubric for Assessment of Program Learning Objectives for the  
Philosophy Major at The College of New Jersey

[Attached]

Common Rubric for Assessment of Program Learning Objectives for the Philosophy Major at The College of New Jersey (Final 2013.03.21)

Course title and number: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

Term: \_\_\_\_\_

Major no. \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ majors in course \_\_\_\_\_

Nature of assignment (including length): \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]