

Summary Assessment Report  
Philosophy  
The College of New Jersey  
September 30, 2013

## 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 subjective 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 Appendix A hereto.

Pursuant to that plan, the following assessments were conducted:

1. Qualitative evaluations/capstone projects. These qualitative (written) evaluations were prepared in each case by the advisor on the particular senior project. The total number of philosophy majors completing their capstones this spring was 4. (Other majors permitted to graduate will be completing their capstones in the summer and fall terms.)
2. Quantitative evaluations/Introduction to Logic. These quantitative (rubric-based) evaluations were completed for exams taken by philosophy majors in two sections of Introduction to Logic (PHL 120) in the spring term of 2013. The total number of philosophy majors enrolled in those sections and completing this particular assignment across the two sections was 4.
3. Senior survey. This survey was distributed to graduating seniors in early May with a reminder to them in early June. Of the 6 seniors who actually graduated in the spring, 3 students returned the survey.

A Confidential Assessment Report was filed with LOAC in June 2013. This Summary Assessment Report summarizes key aspects of that report and also insures that specific individual assessments cannot be related to the work of any given student.

## 1. Qualitative evaluations/capstone theses and projects

Four capstone projects or theses were assessed. These four projects were complete as of the time as which the assessment was effected in May 2013; other projects may have been completed later in the summer. Topics ranged from education, to indigenous people as subjects of knowledge, to an cost-benefit ethics for climate change, to defects in Mill's harm principle.

The capstones were in most cases described as meeting the relevant learning objectives. In the case of one thesis, learning objectives were entirely met. In other cases, particular learning objectives had not been met (e.g. LO4/sustained critique; LO6/formulate own positions clearly and cogently).

Capstones were described by faculty in generally positive terms: descriptions of "coherent positions" were offered; author's own views were "clearly articulated and presented"; "appropriate citation and quotation from other authors"; an "ambitious" project;

Some negatives were reported: one section was described as "not very critical"; "not particularly original"; defense was not entirely "adequate[e]"; relations between schools of thought "not really explain[ed]"; "additional revision" would have improved work.

## 2. Quantitative evaluations/Introduction to Logic

The only course sections that were assessed quantitatively during the spring of 2013 were two sections of logic. Other sections of logic were taught by adjuncts. Within those two sections, four philosophy majors were enrolled. In three of the four cases, the quantitative evaluation given to the students was a "2." In the fourth case, the evaluation was a "1." "2" indicates a "milestone" was reached – that the work demonstrated substantial progress toward the program objective. "1" indicates that the program objective was "at least partially satisfied but in a sketchy and incomplete way."

Note: the Assessment Plan requires designation of a "floater" course for assessment purposes each term. However, no such course was designated for spring 2013 because the Plan was not approved until mid-semester and because the department has committed to designating any floaters at the beginning of the relevant term.

### 3. Senior survey

Three of six seniors completed the senior survey. Their evaluations of their progress toward the program's learning objectives are summed up as follows:

History (ancient and modern): All three students indicated that they believed themselves to have gained a "comprehensive understanding."

Logic: All three students indicated on two of the three metrics that they believed themselves to have developed rigor and precision in logical reasoning and critical thinking; on one such metric ("formal logic"), two of the three indicated that they were neutral and one agreed.

Cogent argumentation; ability to argue clearly and cogently for and against philosophical positions: two of the three students agreed on all of metrics; one of the three students was neutral.

Ethics: Two of the three students indicated that they believed they had obtained a good understanding of ethics; one was neutral

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

Metaphysics: Two of the three students indicated that they believed they had obtained a good understanding of metaphysics; one was neutral.

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

Research: All three students indicated that they believed themselves to have gained the ability to conduct research.

Subfields: Responses were evenly distributed between neutral and agreement.

Interdisciplinarity: Two of the three students indicated that they believed they had been provided the opportunity to explore interdisciplinary issues; one was neutral.

Advising and mentoring: Responses were evenly distributed between neutral and agreement; one student felt neutral about graduate school advising; two students felt neutral about law school advising.

## Conclusions

1. 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 extremely gratifying that the students' responses in the senior survey are generally positive.
2. We may need to consider rewording aspects of the survey. (Any material change in the survey would discredit its year over year results; consistent with that point, however, some editing might be in order.)
  - a. It is necessary to determine whether students responding "neutral" to questions about advising represented the pertinent students. That a student uninterested in applying to graduate school did not highly rate the advice he or she received about graduate school is not pertinent. At the same time, the department agrees that each member must make every effort to have students interested in graduate school or law school consult across the department and specifically to consult with the graduate and law school advisors.
  - 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 are related to their experiences in our main logic course or to their experiences across the curriculum.
3. 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. We all consider learning objectives 4-7 to be of paramount importance; we would like to see student responses to queries relating to those objectives to indicate high degree of confidence across the board.
5. While the numbers may be simply a reflection of the fact that so few students completed the survey, we would like to see concrete evidence of more students applying to and being accepted by graduate or professional schools.
6. While the return rate of 50% on the senior survey was respectable, the actual number of responses returned was low. We will explore means by which that number can be increased in connection with the 2014 senior survey.

## Appendix A

### **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.