

Department of Philosophy, Religion, and Classical Studies
Report on 2018 Assessment
November 12, 2018

The Philosophy Major

At present the only major offered by the department is the BA in Philosophy. The philosophy major combines a thorough study of philosophies that have shaped Western civilization with rigorous training in the analysis of argument. Philosophy majors learn how to analyze and critique arguments, argue effectively for philosophical opinions, make reasoned decisions about ethical issues, actively engage in the debates that have shaped the history of Western thought, and develop reasoned philosophical views of their own on a range of central philosophical issues. Students may opt to complete the major with a specialization in Law and Philosophy or a specialization in Ethics. Like the traditional major, these specializations require the completion of ten courses in philosophy in conformity with basic major requirements. However, students who wish to pursue one of these concentrations are required to select specified courses as options and a senior project or thesis particularly related to the concentration.

Learning Outcomes

The Department subscribes to the Middle States Learning Outcomes and the Learning Goals of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at TCNJ for all of its programs. (See Appendix I.) In addition, the Department has adopted, with LOAC's approval, the following learning outcomes for the major in philosophy. These outcomes are related to specific areas in philosophy.

Students who successfully complete the philosophy major will be able to do the following in each of the areas specified.

(LO 1a) Ethics: Explain central concepts, terms, distinctions, questions, arguments, and theories in ethics (LO1a).

(LO 1b) Epistemology: Explain central concepts, terms, distinctions, questions, arguments, and theories in epistemology (LO1b).

(LO 1c) Metaphysics: Explain central concepts, terms, distinctions, questions, arguments, and theories in metaphysics (LO1c).

(LO 2) Logic: Understand and explain the distinction between valid and invalid arguments, be able (where appropriate) to translate segments of a natural language into symbolic form and

construct proofs. For upper-level students, the objective is to remind students of, and support students in their efforts to apply, techniques and concepts from logic for purposes of evaluating and constructing arguments.

(LO 3) History of philosophy: Explain central questions, arguments, theories, and movements in the history of philosophy, including (as appropriate) ancient, modern, and 20th century philosophy.

(LO 4) Philosophical analysis and critique: Identify, interpret, and develop a sustained critique of arguments, theories, and positions in philosophical works; articulate multiple points of view on philosophical questions demonstrating an understanding of their respective virtues, deficiencies, and implications; and argue clearly and cogently, both orally and in writing, for positions and against alternatives.

(LO 5) Original work: Formulate and defend their own philosophical positions clearly and cogently while demonstrating a firm grasp of opposing positions and objections.

(LO 6) Philosophical research: Undertake philosophical research at a sophisticated level through the careful and in-depth use of primary and (as appropriate) secondary texts

(LO 7) Philosophy and related areas: 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.

New Assessment Methods: 2017-2018

On April of 2017 the Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee (LOAC) of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at TCNJ approved the Department's proposal for a new assessment plan. This plan proposed both direct and indirect measures for assessing the learning of philosophy majors. The direct measures utilize the capstone course (Senior Project, Senior Thesis, Honors Senior Thesis) required for completion of the philosophy major. The senior capstone is independent work guided by an advisor with whom the student will be working closely on a mutually agreed upon topic. The goal of the senior capstone is to give students the opportunity to unify skills and knowledge they have previously gained in the major. Approximately 10 -15 majors each year complete the capstone.

The plan provides that each academic year advisors of senior capstones will submit the completed papers they receive to our program coordinator. After recording pertinent information, she will remove identifying information (name, instructor, etc.) and make two copies of the blinded paper. These copies will be assigned randomly and as evenly as possible to two full-time faculty members other than the paper's advisor. Depending on the number of capstones completed in a given year, each full-time faculty member in the Department will assess 2-3 papers a year. Faculty will be instructed to rate each paper with respect to the Department's nine learning outcomes using the following four rubrics: "Exceeds Expectations" (Coded 3); "Meet Expectations" (Coded 2); "Below Expectations" (Coded 1); and "Not Applicable" (Uncoded). They will report their results to our program coordinator, who will tabulate the results and send that tabulation to our department chair for dissemination to all full-time faculty members.

In addition, the Department will use indirect measures to gauge student perceptions about the efficacy of the major program in helping them to meet learning goals and outcomes. Each year seniors will be asked to complete a short survey on their perceived progress in meeting the nine learning outcomes and other elements of their experience in the department, such as advising and personal growth. Graduates from previous years will be asked from time to time to assess the usefulness of their education in the department to personal and professional growth.

Results of Capstone Assessment.

In May of 2018 twelve capstone papers were submitted for assessment. Each of the department's six full-time faculty were given four papers to assess, so that every paper could be assessed twice. Faculty were given rating sheets and asked to rate the four papers they had received with respect to each of nine learning outcomes. They had four options: Exceeds Expectations (Code 3); Meets Expectations (Code 2); Below Expectations (Code 1); and Not Applicable. We wanted to see how frequently each of the ratings would be selected for each learning outcome. Since every paper was rated twice, it would have been possible for a particular rating to be selected to a particular learning counting many as 24 times or as few as zero times. Our results are presented in the chart below. The first number in each cell represents the number of times a particular rating was selected for a particular learning outcome. The second number represents the number of times that our assessors judged a learning outcome to be applicable to the papers they read: again, a range of 0-24. Thus, the numbers 5/21 for Ethics (LO1a) signify that the assessors

found this learning outcome applicable in 21 out of 24 instances and selected the rating “Exceeds Expectations” in five out of those 21 instances.

Learning Outcome	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations	Not Applicable
LO1a Ethics	5/21	12/21	4/21	3/24
LO1b Epistemology	3/7	3/7	0/7	17/24 [1 Blank]
LO1c Metaphysics	2/11	6/11	1/11	13/24 [2 Blank]
LO2a-&b Logic	4/13	8/13	1/13	11/24
LO3 History of Philosophy	3/10	7/10	0/10	14/24
LO4a&b Philosophical Analysis and Critique	6/22	13/22	3/22	2/24
LO5 Original Work	8/22	10/22	4/22	2/24
LO6 Philosophical Research	7/24	14/24	3/24	0/24
LO7 Philosophy and Related Areas	6/19	13/19	0/19	5/24

These ratings themselves were consistent with our expectations, though we had more discrepancies than expected about the applicability of learning outcomes to some of the papers. We believe this problem can be solved by discussing in some depth what counts as applicable and non-applicable before we assess the next crop of capstone papers.

The Results of the Senior Survey

Prior to commencement the department sent a Qualtrics survey to all of its graduating seniors asking them to assess their perceived progress in meeting the nine learning outcomes (broken out into eleven questions) and to comment on other elements of their experience in the department, such as advising and personal growth. Seven out of fourteen graduating students responded to the survey. Part A of the survey had eleven questions. Each of these questions asked the student: “How well have you learned how

to _____?” (with the blank was filled by one of the learning goals are part thereof). The results of the survey are summarized in the table below.

Learning Outcomes	Very Well	Fairly Well	Somewhat	Not Well	Not At All
1.LO1a Ethics	5	2	0	0	0
2. LO1b Epistemology	3	2	1	1	
3. LO1c Metaphysics	5	1	1	0	0
4. LO2a Logic validity & symbolic form	5	2	0	0	0
5. LO2b Logic Evaluating Arguments	6	1	0	0	0
6. LO3 History of Philosophy	3	2	2	0	0
7. LO4a Philosophical Critique	8	1	0	0	0
8. LO4b Multiple Viewpoints	4	3	0	0	0
9. LO5 Original Work	4	2	1	0	0
10. LO6 Philosophical Research	5	2	0	0	0
11. LO7 Philosophy & Related Areas	5	2	0	0	0

The survey asked two additional questions. The first, was: “Please assess the effectiveness of the academic advising you have received as a philosophy major at TCNJ.” The answer options were: Very Effective; Fairly Effective; Somewhat Effective Not Very Effective; Ineffective. Five of the seven students who responded answered: “Very Effective.” Two answered: “Fairly Effective.” The second question was: “To what extent has your education as a philosophy major at TCNJ contributed to your personal growth?” The answer options were: A Great Deal; Substantially; Somewhat; Not Too Much; Very Little. Five of the seven who responded answered: “A Great Deal.” Two answered: “Substantially.” There were two written comments in response to this question. One student wrote: “Very few non-philosophy courses have challenged me to think critically and logically about my beliefs. Socratic method in most courses has made

me an overall better thinker.” Another student wrote: “I find this to be my most valuable takeaway from TCNJ. It’s unlikely I will be discussing philosophy in great detail in the workplace, but my education in this field has undoubtedly made me a stronger, more careful thinker. Philosophy has given me the tools to cope with the complex and absurd obstacles one can encounter in life, I am a more fulfilled person because of the philosophy program. You have my gratitude.”

These results are encouraging. But we need to find better ways of persuading our graduating seniors to respond to the survey. We will also send a survey to graduates from previous years asking them to assess the usefulness of their education in the department to personal and professional growth.