

Department of Philosophy, Religion, and Classical Studies

Report on 2020-2021 Assessment

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 world civilizations 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 histories of Eastern and 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.¹ 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. 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.

¹ If students opt to do the senior thesis for their capstone, the major requires eleven courses as the senior thesis requires two course units (PHL 495 and PHL 496) for completion.

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

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

(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.

Assessment Methods

In 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 employs both direct and indirect measures for assessing the learning of philosophy majors. The direct measure uses the paper students write for the senior capstone course (Senior Project, Senior Thesis, Honors Senior Thesis). This course is a required course for completion of the philosophy major. The senior capstone is independent work guided by an advisor with whom the student works 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, although only six completed it in 2020-21.

The 2017 plan provides that each academic year supervisors of senior capstones submit the completed papers they receive to our Program Coordinator (currently Cecilia Colbeth). After recording pertinent information, the Program Coordinator removes identifying information (name, instructor, etc.) and makes two copies of the blinded paper. These copies are assigned randomly and as evenly as possible to at least two full-time faculty members other than the capstone's supervisor. Depending on the number of capstones completed in a given year, each full-time faculty member in the Department assesses 2-3 papers a year. Assessors are 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" (Un-coded). They report their results to the Program Coordinator, who then tabulates the results and sends that tabulation to our department chair for dissemination to all full-time faculty members. The supervisor for each senior capstone designates which learning outcomes, in addition to the four (LO2, LO4, LO5, and LO6) required of all senior capstones, are to be assessed. The assessors report their scores for the designated outcomes to the Program Coordinator.

The remaining measures are indirect. Seniors are 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 and graduates are asked from time to time to assess the usefulness of their education in the department to personal and professional growth. Because of the exceptional circumstances created by the Covid-19 epidemic in 2020-21, our department did not take these indirect measures at the end of 2021.

Assessment 2020-2021.

In May of 2020 six capstone papers were submitted for assessment. Each full-time faculty member not on leave was given two learning outcomes to assess, so that every paper could be assessed twice.

Assessors were given rating sheets and asked to rate the four papers they had received with respect to each of the applicable learning outcomes. They had three options: “Exceeds Expectations” (coded with a value of 3); “Meets Expectations” (coded with a value of 2); “Below Expectations (coded with a value of 1).

The percentage listed for each learning outcome in the chart below is derived from the number of times a rating (1, 2, or 3) was given for that outcome divided by the number of times it could have been given.

Learning Outcome	Exceeds Expectations (Value 3)	Meets Expectations (Value 2)	Below Expectations (Value 1)	Applicable Papers/Total Papers	Mean Value
LO1a Ethics	38%	63%	0%	4/6	2.2
LO1b Epistemology	0%	100%	0%	2/6	2
LO1c Metaphysics	0%	100%	0%	2/6	2
LO2 Logic	42%	58%	0%	6/6	2.42
LO3 History of Philosophy	0%	0%	0%	0	N.A.
LO4 Philosophical Analysis and Critique	50%	50%	0%	6/6	2.5
LO5 Original Work	42%	58%	0%	6/6	2.42
LO6 Philosophical Research	67%	33%	0%	6/6	2.67
LO7 Philosophy and Related Areas	50%	50%	0%	2/6	2.5

These ratings were consistent with the normal curves we anticipated.

Senior Survey

The department plans to review the senior survey questions used prior to 2020-21 and develop a new survey for the 2021-22 academic year. We also plan to complete a new survey of former graduates. We will ask them to assess the usefulness of their education in the department to personal and professional growth.