

# Annual Assessment Report

Department: Philosophy

Date: 9/15/2014

Department Chair: Taylor

## I. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Reasoning Abstractly</b>
<b>Who is in Charge</b>	Taylor
<b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>	Selected questions on tests administered in PHI-12 (Critical Reasoning and Logic) administered in the spring of 2014
<b><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></b>	None
<b>Major Findings</b>	We are still in the process of isolating the test questions that we will be using to collect our data. Taylor administered 8 tests in his spring 2014 Critical Reasoning and Logic course (PHI-12). Only some of the questions on these tests are relevant for the assessment of student learning relative to the three Reasoning Abstractly SLOs. We will place the relevant questions into the appropriate SLO categories and then determine how well the students did on each of these questions. Once we have done that, we will have a basis on which to determine whether at least 80% of the students in the class demonstrated proficiency in each of the three areas (that's our benchmark). We hope to have these results soon.
<b>Closing the Loop Activities</b>	We will discuss closing the loop in this area later this fall after we are finished organizing our data and talking about what the data show about student learning in this area.
<p><b>Discussion:</b> Even before seeing the data, we are aware that there are always a number of students who do very poorly on problems that require them to construct symbolic valid deductive arguments. So we have already been talking about our need to figure out how to help these students acquire this skill more effectively. One possible way to address this problem is to spend more time working on these sorts of exercises in class and to assign mentors to struggling students. These mentors would be students in the class who have demonstrated a higher degree of proficiency on these sorts of problems.</p>	

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**II. Follow-ups**

<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Skills</b>
<b>Who is in Charge</b>	<b>Vander Laan</b>
<b>Major Findings</b>	<b>Benchmark mostly met (At least 80% were at least proficient in argument understanding and construction, though only 75% were at least proficient in argument evaluation.) See the Philosophy Department’s 2012 Annual Assessment Report, section II B, for details.</b>
<b>Closing the Loop Activities</b>	<b>At a recent department meeting, we had a prolonged and significant conversation about our findings in this area. Since the results were not as strong as we had hoped they would be, we decided to take the following steps in the attempt to improve our students’ philosophical skills in the future: (1) Include the skills rubric in the Senior Seminar syllabus and discuss it with the students in class as they prepare to write the essay we will be using the rubric to evaluate; (2) Include the rubric in the syllabi of every 100-level philosophy course and use it on at least one assignment in each of those courses; (3) Consider building developmental “scaffolding” assignments into our curriculum so that our students can practice acquiring and developing these skills as they work their way through the major so that by the time they take Senior Seminar (in which we will be assessing their learning in this area), they will be more likely to demonstrate a higher degree of proficiency with these skills.</b>
<b>Discussion: In her memo to our department dated 11/12/2012, in response to our 2012 annual report, Tatiana commended us for using our Senior Seminar as the locale of our assessment of our skills SLO. But she also stated that our sample size of four essays was too small since it wasn’t representative. While we agree with her that this is the case, we also want to make it clear that our Senior Seminar consists only in graduating senior philosophy majors, and there were only four graduating senior philosophy majors in the spring of 2012. So we are wondering if by “larger sample size” she means not more students but instead more essays from the same students.</b>	

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<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Integrating the Major Discipline</b>
<b>Who is in Charge</b>	Taylor
<b>Major Findings</b>	All five students averaged at least “proficient” in two of the three areas specified in the “Integrating the Major Discipline” GE SLO (thus meeting our benchmark). These were the two areas (Philosophical Knowledge & Faith Integration) that were emphasized in the course. Though the other area (Philosophy & the Other Liberal Arts Disciplines) was not emphasized in the course, the class average in this area was “intermediate.” See our 2013 annual report, Appendices C, D, and E for the essay prompts, rubric, and results.
<b>Closing the Loop Activities</b>	Since all five students in this course averaged “proficient” in the two areas emphasized in the course on all four essays each of them wrote, and since our benchmark in this area was consequently met, we decided that these areas are currently strengths in our program and that we do not currently need to make any changes to improve student learning in this area. We have decided to focus our improvement efforts on the specific areas where we have identified needs, including our skills PSLO and (we anticipate) the Reasoning Abstractly SLOs (see the two sections immediately above this one).
Discussion: In spite of our decision not to focus on improvements in this area at the present time, we are planning to discuss ways to refine the rubric we are using to evaluate student work in this area.	

**III. Other assessment or key questions-related projects**

<b>Project</b>	Refine Knowledge & Virtues PLOs to make them more assessable
<b>Who is in Charge</b>	Nelson, Taylor, & Vander Laan
<b>Major Findings</b>	Our Knowledge PLO is now, “Students will <u>demonstrate knowledge of</u> important philosophical positions, concepts, arguments, and themes.”

	Our Virtues PLO is now, “Students will <u>demonstrate</u> both <u>enthusiasm</u> for rational inquiry and <u>awareness</u> of the limits of rational inquiry.”
Action	We have asked our secretary to update the “Major Program Student Learning Outcomes” page on our department website to reflect these changes. We will also use these new formulations (with their <u>underlined</u> more measurable active verbs) to design our assessment instruments when we assess student learning in these areas.
<p>Discussion: In revising these PLOs, we consulted a document entitled, “Statement on Outcomes Assessment” on the website of the American Philosophical Association (<a href="http://www.apaonline.org/?outcomes">http://www.apaonline.org/?outcomes</a>). This document contains example PSLOs in the cognitive (knowledge and understanding), affective (skills), and social (values) dimensions. An example of a PSLO in the cognitive area is “Demonstrate knowledge of the views of some historically important philosophers.” An example of one in the social area is “Demonstrate openness and intellectual humility by approaching situations involving a conflict of views in a spirit of inquiry.” So the language we have chosen for our PSLOs is similar to the language employed in these PSLOs recommended by the APA, our discipline’s official organization.</p>	

Project	Curricular Changes
Who is in Charge	Nelson, Taylor, Vander Laan
Major Findings	We have been discussing the possibility of dividing our Critical Reasoning and Logic course into two courses (“Critical Reasoning” and “Formal Logic”). We have also been talking about dividing “Ancient & Medieval Philosophy” into two courses (“Ancient Philosophy” and “Medieval Philosophy”) and “Modern & Contemporary Philosophy into two courses (“Modern Philosophy” and “19 <sup>th</sup> - 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy”). We have decided that each of the three existing courses we plan to divide into two courses does not provide our students with the kind of in-depth learning that philosophy students at many other institutions receive in courses that can go into more depth because they are not designed to cover so many topics in a single course.
Action	We are in the process of developing syllabi for these new courses. Vander Laan is constructing syllabi for the logic courses, Taylor is constructing syllabi for the Ancient Philosophy and Medieval Philosophy courses, and Nelson is constructing syllabi for the Modern Philosophy and 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy courses. Our plan is to submit new course proposals for each of these courses by this year’s deadline of January 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2015.
Discussion: We plan to offer the new courses according to the following schedule: Year 1, Fall – Ancient Philosophy; Spring – Medieval	

Philosophy, Critical Reasoning; Year 2, Fall – Modern Philosophy; Spring – 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy, Formal Logic. We will require our majors to take at least one of the logic courses. We will strongly encourage philosophy majors who plan to attend a philosophy graduate program to take the Formal Logic course. We also plan to talk to the Mathematics & Computer Science department about the possibility of cross listing the Formal Logic course with their department. We will also propose both of these logic courses as means to satisfy the GE Reasoning Abstractly requirement (as Critical Reasoning & Logic currently does). As for the history of philosophy courses, we will require our students to take two out of the four courses. If we end up expanding our major from 36 to 40 or 44 units we may require philosophy majors to take three of the four history courses. We will continue to discuss the implications of increasing the size of our major and we are thinking of polling our current majors and minors to help us think this through. We will also be asking faculty in other departments for guidance and advice, and we will be checking to make sure we know what the approval process involves.

<b>Project</b>	Discussions with other Westmont departments about assessment
<b>Who is in Charge</b>	Nelson
<b>Major Findings</b>	Mark had conversations with Alister Chapman about the history department’s assessment practices and with Tom Knecht about the political science department’s assessment practices. His summaries of these conversations are contained in Appendix C. Alister recommended (1) a department retreat funded by the PRC at which we could “think big thoughts together” about what we are or will be assessing in our students’ work; (2) that we divide up assessment work into manageable tasks that could be performed by each of us individually and then discuss the results together at department meetings; (3) have our department secretary go to the websites of specific philosophy departments to look for PSLOs and copy and collate them for us; (4) avoid certain words (such as ‘understand’) in our SLOs since it is difficult to measure the degree of students learning relative to SLOs phrased in terms of those words – even if we will end up not being able to assess learning of a sort we consider important; and (5) focus on fewer SLOs for assessment purposes each year rather than more. Tom recommended that we (1) gather information as individuals but discuss results as a department (same as Alister’s recommendation #2); (2) engage in collective grading exercises in which we read and evaluate the same student work relative to the same rubric so that we can calibrate and harmonize our grading standards and practices; (3) check with other institutions about their assessment practices primarily in connection with our next six-year review; (4) use words like ‘explain,’ ‘analyze,’ and ‘criticize,’ instead of ‘understand’ in our SLOs (same as Alister’s recommendation #4); and (5) assess fewer things and things that are relatively easy to assess – as long as our assessment can yield useful

	information for the improvement of student learning in our program (similar to Alister’s recommendation #5).
<b>Action</b>	As a result of these conversations, we have decided to do the following three things: (1) We will seek funding from Tatiana or the PRC for a possible departmental retreat we would take this fall (as soon as we can find a time that will work for all three of us). The purpose of this retreat would be to complete the “loop-closing” activities that we have allowed to remain unfinished while we have taken turns being on sabbatical for the last three years and to discuss ways we can implement more frequent and regular collective departmental program review and assessment activities so that these activities will become an automatic and normal part of our departmental life and practices. We will also plan to engage in a collective grading exercise while we are on the retreat so that we can think together about calibrating and harmonizing our grading standards and practices. (2) We will ask our secretary Victoria to look for PSLOs on other philosophy department websites and to copy and collate them for our use. We will also ask Victoria to make sure that all of our assessment related materials (Department Mission Statement, PSLOs, Curriculum Map, and Multi-Year Assessment Plan) are up-to-date on our website and also to make sure that we are on track in our annuals collection of individual and departmental data in preparation for our next six-year report. And (3) We will continue to monitor the language of our PSLOs as we evaluate their effectiveness for our assessment purposes.
<b>Discussion</b>	

<b>Project</b>	Discussions with philosophy departments at other institutions about assessment
<b>Who is in Charge</b>	Vander Laan
<b>Major Findings</b>	None yet
<b>Action</b>	None yet
<b>Discussion:</b> We are contacting the philosophy departments at Gordon, Houghton, and Whittier to initiate discussions with them about their departmental assessment practices. These departments are from a list of philosophy programs at other institutions with which we compared our department in our 2011 Six-Year Report. We will be asking them (1) what their PSLOs are, and (2) what challenges they have faced as philosophy departments assessing student work and how they have met those challenges.	



**IV. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan: None**

**V. Appendices**

- A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data
- B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data
- C. Summaries of conversations with the Westmont history and political science departments