

## Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Program: Philosophy Major   | Department: Philosophy                                  |
| Degree or Certificate Level: BA   | College/School: CAS                                     |
| Date (Month/Year): 9/21   | Primary Assessment Contact: Scott Ragland (Dept. Chair) |
| In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 20-21          |   |
| In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2015 |   |

### 1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

Those contained in the far left column of this rubric:

| Learning Outcome   | Fails to Meet Expectations (1pt)  | Meets Expectations (2pts)   | Exceeds Expectations (3pts)   |
|--|---|---|---|
| Student correctly employs principles of logical reasoning in philosophical analysis. | Student fails to identify fallacies in the reasoning of others discussed in the paper, or the student's own argumentation is logically flawed.                              | When needed, student makes the logical structure of arguments explicit in order to identify fallacies in the reasoning of others or to clarify the student's own reasoning. Student commits no fallacies. | Student consistently uses logical analysis to render other author's positions more clear than they did themselves, or demonstrates a grasp of logical principles exceeding those taught in introductory logic courses.    |
| Student analyzes and defends a philosophical position on a philosophical problem.    | Student fails to understand key aspects of chosen problem, or fails to articulate a clear position, or fails to consider or respond to relevant criticisms of the position. | Student clearly articulates a philosophical problem, takes a clear position on that problem, and defends own position against relevant and plausible lines of criticism.                                  | Student's grasp of the problem, novelty of position, or depth of analysis and sophistication of argumentation are commensurate with graduate or professional status.  |
| Student gathers sources relevant to a philosophical problem.                         | Student fails to include necessary sources for the topic or includes irrelevant sources.  | Student includes all and only relevant primary and secondary sources. The student's paper is a good snapshot of the current state of discussion.  | Student includes groundbreaking research into primary sources or synthesizes information in novel ways that advance the current discussion of the topic.  |
| Student interprets sources relevant to a philosophical problem.                      | Student significantly misinterprets sources   | Student's interpretation of sources is accurate and plausible on all significant points.  | Student offers a compelling interpretation of sources that is novel or groundbreaking in some way.  |
| Student synthesizes sources relevant to a philosophical problem.                     | Student's synthesis misrepresents the current state of the debate on the topic or fails to adequately connect to the student's defense of own position.                     | Thesis presents an accurate, unified snapshot of the current state of discussion and the student's own argument clearly draws on or relates to this snapshot.   | Thesis portrays the current state of discussion in a way that is not only accurate and unified, but also novel—opening up new possibilities for research or argument. The student's own position draws on this portrayal. |

### 2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please identify the course(s) in which these artifacts were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

Student papers from the various sections of PHIL 4880 (Senior Inquiry: Project). Those are the philosophy major capstone courses. Each is an independent study by the student under the direction of a single faculty member, culminating in a philosophical research paper. These papers were the artefacts used for assessment of the philosophy major.

These courses were all offered via zoom from the St. Louis campus during 20/21.

### 3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and include them in/with this report.

Each senior inquiry director (faculty member) was asked to score the student’s paper against the rubric above (in #1) and report the results to the department chair via a google form (attached).

### 4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcome(s)? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

Philosophy graduated 14 majors this year (3 in the fall and 11 in the spring) and feedback forms were completed by faculty for 11 of those students. The results are attached if you want to look at the details. Here is a summary.

An average of around 2 suggests that majors are on average achieving the desired learning outcomes. Here are the average results for the 5 outcomes on the senior inquiry rubric for this year as compared to last year:

|                                  | 19/20 Academic Year | 20/21 Academic Year |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Use of Logic:                    | 2.3                 | 2.2                 |
| Analyzes and Defends a Position: | 2.3                 | 2.2                 |
| Gathers Sources:                 | 2.16                | 2.3                 |
| Interprets Sources:              | 2.16                | 2.3                 |
| Synthesizes Sources:             | 2.16                | 2.3                 |

In the previous year, we had only 6 completed forms for the 15 students who did the senior inquiry. So our rate of faculty participation was much higher this year, though we are still short of full faculty participation.

### 5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

What we learned about student learning:

1. all but one student met or exceeded expectations on all the learning outcomes. We interpret this to mean that the philosophy major is in general facilitating the learning that it is supposed to, and is not in need of curricular change.
2. Note that due to pandemic-related logistical problems, the faculty were not able to follow up in 20/21 on the following remarks from last year’s report:

However, there is something important to learn from the one student who failed to meet expectations on the three outcomes related to handling sources. The director of that student commented in the open-ended section of the rubric that the student might not have had these problems if a “senior seminar” were in place. This comment suggests the student may not have been engaging with the director on a regular basis throughout the semester, in order to receive sufficient direction on how to gather, interpret, and synthesize relevant sources. There appears to be a connection between this one case and the data from the prior year, summarized in the AY 18-19 assessment report as follows:

. . . note the following two qualitative comments:

weak on citation of sources

student only completed one draft. I identified problems and I think the second draft will be better. I would have liked more drafts

These two comments fit together with themes from an informal assessment discussion that occurred among philosophy faculty who were present for the students’ oral presentations of their senior inquiry projects. Faculty noted that because the department’s model for this capstone is the independent study, the methods for pedagogy, timelines of due dates, and standards of assessment vary widely from one faculty member to another. Faculty admitted to one another that directing these projects is often a low priority, especially as the end of term becomes hectic. Students who do not take their own initiative can easily fall through the cracks.

In light of this information, the philosophy department should discuss possible ways to modify the curricular structure of the major capstone. One promising model: create a “capstone seminar” that would be led by a faculty member and would be mandatory for all students doing a senior inquiry. This would meet one a week, or once every other week, and would serve as a workshop and accountability group for the students, to keep them more on track to produce an initial draft of their projects by shortly after midterm. Another suggestion: create a “senior inquiry syllabus template” that sets forth timelines and standards held in common across all the students, even though they have different directors.

Based on data from two years in a row that seemed to indicate a danger of our senior inquiry structures allowing students to “fall through the cracks,” the faculty discussed during early 2021 the possibility of creating either a “senior seminar” type course, or at the very least creating a common syllabus (with timeline for assignments) for the senior inquiry course. They also agreed to change the final oral presentations from papers to posters. However, because of pandemic restrictions, we did not hold final presentations at all in spring 2021, so we will have to see how that change works out this year.

A committee will be appointed in 2021/22 to further discuss changes to the senior inquiry structures.

What we have learned about the assessment process:

In 18/19, 10 of the 13 graduating students were assessed by faculty via the form. During 19/20, only 6 out of 15 were assessed. But in 20/21, the participation rate bounced back to 11/14. This suggests that the miserable rate of data-gathering in the prior year was more due to the pandemic than it was to an inherent weakness in our procedures. Still, the chair and admin have taken measures (reminders we just put on our calendars) to ensure that faculty will get multiple prompts to complete the forms, both before and right after the final grading period.

## 6. Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of Current Assessment Findings

- A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

Results from the last cycle were discussed in early 2021. The results of this cycle will be discussed during fall 2021.

B. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies

- Course content
- Teaching techniques
- Improvements in technology
- Prerequisites
- Course sequence
- New courses
- Deletion of courses
- Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings

Changes to the Assessment Plan

- Student learning outcomes
- Artifacts of student learning
- Evaluation process
- Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics)
- Data collection methods
- Frequency of data collection

Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of these findings.

Assessment Plan Changes: The latest data set suggests we can continue to use the same basic rubric and data-gathering method, but administrators have added calendar reminders for themselves in advance so that they can pester faculty who are not complying, and do so in a timely manner. This should ensure a more robust data set going forward.

Curricular Changes to course content:

- The mode of oral presentations associated with the senior inquiry projects will change for the 21/22 academic year. We will use posters instead of papers. This change was undertaken in response to observations gleaned in several prior rounds of assessment.
- In addition, the structure of senior inquiry projects will be revised this year, though the exact form is yet-to-be determined by a committee.

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

## 7. Closing the Loop: Review of Previous Assessment Findings and Changes

A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?

Pedagogical Changes: In the past, senior inquiry students were invited to give oral presentations about their projects at a "senior inquiry symposium" at the end of the academic year. Assessment and observation of the event in recent years prompted the department to adopt a new format of "poster presentations" rather than a series of speeches by students. The department voted in fall 2019 to begin the new format in spring 21, but due to the pandemic we did not follow through on that (we didn't have presentations at all that term). **We will follow through on that change this year.**

Assessment Changes: in the 2019 report, it was noted:

The Department of Philosophy should probably consider undertaking a "curriculum mapping" exercise, where the courses relevant to the historical synthetic ability are identified (these answers are a good start but there may be other relevant courses) and their syllabi are studied, perhaps with discussion amongst those instructors taking place to determine if they would like to emphasize certain themes more.

We planned to discuss this possible modification in the undergrad program committee in spring of 21, but we were overwhelmed with work related to ramping up for the new core and so did not get to it. The department chair will ask this committee to address curriculum mapping during 21/22.

**B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?**

Because they have not yet been implemented, they have not been assessed. However, the new format is probably best assessed by dividing the second learning outcome (able to analyze and defend a philosophical position on a philosophical problem) into written and oral manifestations, with faculty “scorers” assessing the student’s explanation of their poster against the rubric.

**C. What were the findings of the assessment?**

Not yet assessed

**D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?**

N/A

**IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools and/or revised/updated assessment plans along with this report.**