Undergraduate Degree Program Assessment Progress Report Cover Sheet

Degree: Philosophy

For Calendar Year: 2014

(Date submitted to college committee:) 3/9/15

(Date posted on college assessment website:)

By: ____________________________

Overall Rating: ____________________________

Respond to all six parts following the “Degree Program Assessment Progress Report Instructions.” Attach additional pages as needed.

(NOTE: Parts 1 through 4 can be copied from the relevant sections of your assessment plan.)

(1) **Student learning goal(s) addressed this year:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
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<tr>
<td>Students completing the program in philosophy should be able to:</td>
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A. convey a clear understanding of historical and contemporary philosophical inquiry. That is, express and evaluate with clarity and precision the ideas, claims and arguments offered by others on such topics as the nature of human being, what counts as a life lived well, and the limits of human understanding; and

Relevant Core Competencies: Critical Thinking, Ethical and Moral Consciousness, Historical Consciousness, International Awareness, Philosophy and Methods of Science, Social and Cultural Awareness, and Verbal Literacy

B. demonstrate their ability to think independently about a philosophical topic or problem and clearly support, defend and state their own views.

Relevant Core Competencies: Critical Thinking, Verbal Literacy

(2) **Learning outcomes/objectives for those goals addressed this year:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Learning Objectives (LO1, LO2 &amp; LO3)</th>
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<td>The program will attempt to meet the above goals by measuring student performance in relation to the objectives below. Students successfully completing the philosophy B.A. should be able to:</td>
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1. clearly explain how a particular thinker has attempted to address a
philosophical problem, including the reasoning and arguments offered in support of addressing the problem in that way (Goal A);

2. clearly explain the significance and importance of a particular thinker’s approach to a problem, i.e., explain the value of a historical figure’s approach to a topic or problem, regardless of whether that approach is thought to be problematic (Goal A);

3. develop an argument of their own — critical or constructive — in support of a philosophical thesis (Goal B).

(3) Courses & activities where assessed:

At 3 points: Introduction to Philosophy, a mid-level course in the history of philosophy and in a 4000 senior level topics seminar. The assessment tool will be a paper assigned in class. In addition, students will complete a survey in their final advising meeting before graduation.

2014 was the first year of our plan and so papers were collected from all sections of Introduction to Philosophy taught that year. In 2015 we will assess essays pulled from our history of philosophy sections.

(4) Methods used:

20 essays were randomly selected and 3 members of the department agreed to score the papers in accordance with the learning objectives (stated above) and scoring rubric (described below) found in the philosophy assessment plan.
(5) What are the assessment findings? How did you analyze them?

The overall pattern of scoring was quite similar and reflects what one might expect in first essays from introduction to philosophy students: most of the students are able to summarize views and arguments but evaluating and analyzing these arguments is a more refined skill that, hopefully, we will see more of in upper level essays.

For each learning objective a 0 is the lowest score and 3 the highest. With 20 papers that gives us a lowest of 0 and a highest possible score of 60 for each learning objective. Multiplied by 3 (for 3 scorers) that gives us a possible high of 180 for each learning objective. Summing together the scores gave us the following benchmarks

| LO1 | 119.5 |
| LO2 | 62    |
| LO3 | 80.5  |

A ‘Minimal’ degree of competence is equal to or lower than 20 per scorer or 60 overall
A ‘Satisfactory’ degree of competence is equal to or not lower than 40 per scorer or 120 overall.
A ‘High’ degree of competence is equal to 180.

On LO1 introduction to philosophy students come into the program with a near satisfactory level of performance averaged out. In our next phase we would like to see a score that places the average firmly in the ‘satisfactory’ category as we work in upper level classes to improve these skills.

On LO2 our students just cross the line for ‘minimal’ competence and on LO3 our students show minimal competence with major improvements needed to reach ‘satisfactory’ performance. In our next phase we would hope to see significant improvement in these results once the history part of the curriculum takes effect.

(6) What conclusions were drawn and what decisions were made as a result? How were stakeholder groups involved?

The results for LO2 are particularly low requiring a near doubling to reach the ‘satisfactory’ level. One faculty member scoring the papers found LO2 difficult to interpret. This objective, or something close to it, was part of my predecessors plan and I wanted to retain it for our new plan. The description of the objective captures two aspects of one component. The key component of LO2 is the language of ‘significance’ and ‘importance’ that, in one aspect, speaks to the analytic skills of weighing up and judging an argument which are part of critical analysis and evaluation. This distinguishes it from LO1 (which is concerned with summative skills only) and LO3 (concerned with students developing and constructing their own argument, which may include LO1 and LO2). However, ‘significance’ and ‘importance’ are to be assessed not only in terms of ‘analytic’ skill as such but also in terms of the historical background and context of an argument’s emergence. For example, we don’t simply want our students to extract an argument from, say, Descartes and evaluate it by reconstructing its premises and conclusion—although we do want them to do that. We also want our students to
understand the importance of the textual and contextual conditions that enabled that argument to be made. This, I take it, is the importance of the historical part of our curriculum and why 6 credits in it are required. This will come to the fore hopefully in our next phase which assesses papers from our history courses. A discussion with those scoring in the next phase will clarify this.

Stakeholder involvement includes the distribution and discussion of results with faculty, class evaluations, alumni survey and graduate exit interviews.