

Philosophy Learning Assessment Report

Guidelines

Please see the companion document, “Learning Assessment Template with Instructions” for detailed guidelines and examples.

- All departments/programs offering undergraduate majors must complete and submit this document at least once every *three* academic years per the H&S schedule.
- Completed forms should be emailed as an attachment to learning_assessment@lists.stanford.edu.
- Completed forms should be submitted by August 15 of the academic year assigned to your department/program. Please see attached assessment schedule (also available in the department/program GUS-HSDO AFS archive folder).
- Small programs (those graduating fewer than ten students a year) may need to collect and archive student work every year in order to have enough student work for meaningful evaluation. If you would like more information on archiving student work, please contact Beth McKeown, bmckeown@stanford.edu.

1. Assessment Plan

1.a Program Information	
Name of Program (Major)	Philosophy
School	Humanities and Sciences
Academic Years Covered by this Plan	2017-18
1.b Primary Faculty Contact	
Name	Nadeem Hussain
Position	Director of Undergraduate Studies
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1.c Other Contacts	
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1.d Program Mission Statement

The mission of the undergraduate program in Philosophy is to train students to think clearly and critically about the deepest and broadest questions concerning being, knowledge, and value, as well as their connections to the full range of human activities and interests. The Philosophy major presents students with paradigms and perspectives of past thinkers and introduces students to a variety of methods of reasoning and judgment formation. Courses in the major equip students with core skills involved in critical reading, analytical thinking, sound argumentation, and the clear, well-organized expression of ideas. Philosophy is an excellent major for those planning a career in law, medicine, business, or the non-profit sector. It provides analytical skills and a breadth of perspective helpful to those called upon to make decisions about their own conduct and the welfare of others. Philosophy majors who have carefully planned their undergraduate program have an excellent record of admission to professional and graduate schools.

1.e Undergraduate Program Learning Outcomes

The department expects undergraduate majors in the program to be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes. These learning outcomes are used in evaluating students and the department's undergraduate program.

A. Skills:

1. ability to effectively communicate philosophical ideas orally and in writing
2. skills of close reading, argument evaluation, and analytical writing
3. dialectical ability to identify strengths and weaknesses of an argument and devise appropriate and telling responses
4. critically thinking and demonstrate clarity of conceptualization
5. ability to differentiate good from unpromising philosophical questions
6. ability to sustain an argument of substantial scope, showing control over logical, argumentative, and evidential relations among its parts

B. Content:

7. mastery of a domain of literature, an area of philosophical problems, or an area in the history of thought
8. understanding of argumentative relations among different philosophical issues in their area, and an ability to discriminate between problems that must be addressed, and those that may be deferred to future work
9. will frame and pursue more deeply a philosophical question within the domain
10. will develop, articulate, and defend a thesis about the question
11. will show knowledge and awareness of plausible objections to their arguments, and resourcefulness in responding to them

1.f Assessment Design

Assessment Question

What is the degree of proficiency in the department's main learning goals attained by students in PHIL 194, the required capstone seminar taken by most majors as they near completion of the program? A version of the course is usually offered each quarter. Three courses are included in this assessment.

<p>Nature of Student Work or Performance</p>	<p>Student performance in all aspects of PHIL 194 was observed by course instructors. PHIL 194 is always taught by faculty members as a small seminar course. It involves intensive reading and discussion of challenging philosophical texts and substantial student writing, which permits, for example, assessment of the learning goal concerning maintaining control over an argument at large scope. Often papers for PHIL 194 treat student generated topics, permitting assessment of learning goal 5, about the differentiation of good from unpromising philosophical questions. Students are assessed on their mastery of the reading as manifested in philosophical interaction, their dialectical skills in classroom discussion and other interactions with the professor, and writing through the final paper and other assignments.</p>
<p>How Student Work will be Analyzed</p>	<p>Faculty are asked to reflect on overall student performance on each learning goal, as manifested through in class participation, demonstrated mastery over the readings, one-on-one interaction with faculty in the course of paper writing and general philosophical inquiry, and on the final paper and other writing assignments for the course. They fill out an assessment chart keyed to the department learning goals. Each student receives an overall assessment on each goal at one of four levels: exemplary, proficient, marginal, or unacceptable.</p>
<p>Other Notes on the Assessment Design</p>	<p>Only students who were declared majors in philosophy or philosophy and religious studies were assessed.</p>

1.g Learning Outcomes Rubric				
	Unacceptable	Marginal	Proficient	Exemplary
Demonstrate ability to effectively <i>communicate</i> philosophical ideas orally and in writing.	Struggles to articulate ideas; offers non-responsive replies, confused explanations; or does not participate in discussions.	Able to make themselves understood, but is often vague, or is unable to explain things clearly to a non-expert; limited participation.	Offers clear explanations, effective arguments, and reasonable interpretations of their interlocutors.	Crisply explains ideas in a penetrating way; capable of producing illumination even for fellow students with a tenuous hold on the material overall.
Demonstrate skills of <i>close reading, argument evaluation, and analytical writing</i> .	Writing is stilted, fundamentally unclear, or marred by fallacies and non-sequiturs; interpretations show gross misunderstandings; student unable to see the force of compelling arguments.	Writing unclear or lacking explicitness and structure; some definite failures of interpretation; marginal grasp of argumentative connections.	Writes clearly, and with control over expository structure; solid grasp of opposing positions and source texts; clear command of the argumentative situation.	Writes forcefully, with both originality and clear responsiveness to disciplinary and argumentative expectations; analysis of arguments shows genuine, or even striking, insights; interpretations not only fair, but surprising and illuminating.
Demonstrate <i>dialectical ability</i> to identify strengths and weaknesses of an argument and devise appropriate and telling responses.	Argues responsively, with frequent use of non-opposite points, ad hominem or otherwise irrelevant considerations, fallacies.	Shows some ability to make and respond to reasonable argument, with limited collapse into irrelevant or fallacious moves.	Argues well, with sensitivity to potential objections, quick grasp of the power and limits of particular points; avoids or quickly corrects fallacies.	Shows ability to develop incisive, compelling arguments even in new areas; demonstrates impressive command over the full range of dialectical considerations within an area; capable of surprising or unusually resourceful deployment of argumentative considerations.

<p><i>Critical thinking and clarity of conceptualization.</i></p>	<p>Fails to demonstrate basic understanding of source material; unable to assess sources and arguments effectively; concedes easily to authority.</p>	<p>Able to grasp the basic shape of a philosophical problem, but with limited ability to ask good questions about it, or to evaluate proposals on her own.</p>	<p>Clear grasp of philosophical problems and of sufficient implications to place them in context; shows ability to understand and raise questions about the presuppositions of a debate; good evaluation of arguments.</p>	<p>Penetrating understanding of philosophical problems, with a wide grasp of implications; capable of raising deep-going questions about philosophical positions and arguments; shows ability and willingness to refine own ideas through criticism.</p>
<p>Demonstrate ability to <i>differentiate</i> good from unpromising philosophical questions.</p>	<p>Often fails to understand what is at stake in questions posed by the texts under consideration and discussion partners; shifts focus to irrelevant or unanswerable questions.</p>	<p>Able to understand most questions posed by the instructor or other discussants; shows little originality or initiative in posing questions for themselves.</p>	<p>Quickly grasps the main questions at issue; sees many implications of those questions; able to pose questions of their own that make contact with an ongoing literature, or recognizably philosophical issues.</p>	<p>Shows strong originality in both formulating a question of their own, and refining and framing the question to render it tractable; able to explain to others why a new problem matters; connects new questions to extant ones in an illuminating way.</p>
<p>Demonstrate the ability to <i>sustain an argument of substantial scope</i>, showing control over logical, argumentative, and evidential relations among its parts.</p>	<p>Longer papers lack coherence and structure; different sections of a paper or argument do not fit together; argumentative links non-existent or inexplicit.</p>	<p>Able to write a longer (e.g., 15-20 pp.) philosophical paper with relatively simple structure, but without substantial originality, lacking explicitness of argument, and/or lacking in strong argumentative cohesiveness.</p>	<p>Able to write a solid paper of substantial scope which maintains good control over different strands of argument and is able to show how they connect together.</p>	<p>Able to write excellent papers of medium to large scope; controls the argument within a clear and compelling explicit structure; shows originality in defining, filling out, and then appropriately limiting the terrain to be covered by the argument.</p>

Demonstrate <i>mastery over a domain</i> of literature, an area of philosophical problems, or an area in the history of thought.	Student fails to master the subject matter and cannot recall the key philosophical arguments and ideas in the area.	Student demonstrates some understanding of what the subject area is, but with substantial gaps in knowledge and/or understanding.	Student shows strong understanding of the field and its questions; knows and understands the primary arguments, distinctions, and ideas, and can use them to make further points on their own; shows some grasp of secondary literature.	Student has easy facility with the questions and results of the field, and a strong understanding of their implications for other areas; able to make resourceful use of their knowledge to pursue further, original points; has good command of sophisticated secondary literature and relevant historical background.
Demonstrate an understanding of <i>argumentative relations</i> among different philosophical issues in their area, and an ability to discriminate between problems that must be addressed, and those that may be deferred to future work.	Shows little understanding, or gross misunderstanding, of standard philosophical moves in the area; fails to grasp basic distinctions; writing lacks structure and coherence.	Shows basic but shallow understanding of arguments and distinctions; sometimes loses control of those arguments and distinctions in use, or fails to see obvious objections to a line of thought.	Solid grasp of the basic moves characteristic of the field (as introduced in the seminar or research experience); reasonable ability to deploy those moves in novel contexts; shows awareness of other relevant issues, and sensitivity to the implications of different possible positions concerning those issues.	Demonstrates deep-going understanding of an issue and of relevant surrounding questions; understands the available philosophical tools for addressing the issue, and shows the capacity to deploy those tools in new or striking ways; locates her results in a compelling way against the philosophical background.
Will <i>frame</i> and pursue more deeply a philosophical <i>question</i> within the domain.	Student thinks for themselves only with difficulty or not at all, and relies on others for ideas, paper topics, etc.; lacks sufficient understanding of the material to	Able to propose questions of their own, but unable to refine them without substantial help.	Able to frame and refine a good question, relevant to the literature and/or the problem space introduced in the capstone course or research experience.	Identifies and refines a genuinely original philosophical question; shows excellent ability to place their own inquiry against the background of literature in the field; able

	determine what questions might be worth pursuing.			to motivate interest in the question.
Will develop, articulate, and <i>defend a thesis</i> about the question.	Unable to make clear what point needs to be made in an argument; or unable to state the core thesis of an argument clearly.	Able to state the thesis, but only with difficulty, or unclarity, or combined with irrelevant considerations.	Able to cleanly and crisply state the thesis under discussion; shows a clear understanding of the sort of considerations needed to clarify and/ or support the thesis.	Develops original philosophical thesis of their own; states the thesis with admirable clarity and minimal fuss; either clarifies the thesis in a new and surprising way, or identifies a novel and interesting mode of arguing for or against it.
Will show knowledge and awareness of plausible objections to their arguments, and resourcefulness in responding to them.	Student shows little to no grasp of relevant philosophical literature, and limited argumentative imagination; unable to appreciate the force of objections when they are presented.	Student seems to grasp objections when presented, but may not see their implications or appreciate their full force; limited or no ability to refine her position by coming up with plausible objections on her own.	Student has solid grasp of a range of primary and secondary literature, and shows good awareness of the logical space of alternative positions and considerations on their behalf; student anticipates objections and makes adequate moves to defuse them.	Student shows unusual command over the literature and keen sensitivity to dialectical possibilities; able to refine their position by coming up with creative and compelling objections on their own; shows resourcefulness and originality in responding to objections posed by others.

2. Collect and Assess Student Work

2.a Timeline of Assessment Activities		
Academic Year	Planned Activities (Fill in all rows of this column at the time the Assessment Plan is created, saying what you plan to do each year for the next three years going forward.)	Actual Assessment Activities Completed (Fill in one row of this column at the conclusion of each academic year, saying what activities were in fact completed.)
2017-2018	Professors observe students and collect written work at the time of teaching each version of Phil 194. Professors fill out assessment form based on their assessments of the student work.	Assessment forms completed.

3. Results and Assessment Report

3.a Learning Outcomes Data Table					
	Unacceptable	Marginal	Proficient	Exemplary	Total Number of Students Assessed
Demonstrate ability to effectively <i>communicate</i> philosophical ideas orally and in writing.	0 (0%)	8 (31%)	8 (31%)	10 (38%)	26
Demonstrate skills of <i>close reading, argument evaluation, and analytical writing</i> .	1 (4%)	5 (19%)	12 (46%)	8 (31%)	26
Demonstrate <i>dialectical ability</i> to identify strengths and weaknesses of an argument and devise appropriate and telling responses.	0 (0%)	7 (27%)	12 (46%)	7 (27%)	26
<i>Critical thinking</i> and <i>clarity</i> of conceptualization.	0 (0%)	5 (19%)	12 (46%)	9 (35%)	26
Demonstrate ability to <i>differentiate</i> good from unpromising philosophical questions.	0 (0%)	10 (38%)	5 (19%)	11 (42%)	26
Demonstrate the ability to <i>sustain an argument of substantial scope</i> , showing control over logical, argumentative, and evidential relations among its parts.	1 (4%)	6 (23%)	11 (42%)	8 (31%)	26

Demonstrate <i>mastery over a domain</i> of literature, an area of philosophical problems, or an area in the history of thought.	0 (0%)	8 (31%)	10 (38%)	8 (31%)	26
Demonstrate an understanding of <i>argumentative relations</i> among different philosophical issues in their area, and an ability to discriminate between problems that must be addressed, and those that may be deferred to future work.	0 (0%)	6 (23%)	14 (54%)	6 (23%)	26
Will <i>frame</i> and pursue more deeply a philosophical <i>question</i> within the domain.	0 (0%)	5 (19%)	13 (50%)	8 (31%)	26
Will develop, articulate, and <i>defend a thesis</i> about the question.	0 (0%)	7 (27%)	12 (46%)	7 (27%)	26
Will show knowledge and awareness of plausible objections to their arguments, and resourcefulness in responding to them.	0 (0%)	5 (19%)	13 (50%)	8 (31%)	26

Notes: “Count” is the raw number and “%” the percentage of students evaluated who fall into each category (e.g. the number scored exemplary on learning outcome #1 divided by the total number of students assessed on learning outcome #1). **Please enter “0” when no students fall in a category; please do NOT leave any cells blank. Please check that percentages across each row sum to 100%, or note rounding error.** The table can be adapted to display trends over time or compare subgroups. Please contact learning_assessment@lists.stanford.edu for assistance.

3.b Assessment Report	
Written Summary of Assessment Results	A majority of students in PHIL 194 are attaining learning goals at a level of proficiency or higher. A significant number of students performed at a marginal level.
Limitations of the Assessment Results	<p>Though PHIL 194 is intended as a capstone seminar for our majors most faculty who teach it do not require that students take the course in their senior year. We provide assessment information only from juniors and seniors who are philosophy or philosophy and religious students majors. Since many students start the major relatively late (relative to STEM fields for example) having discovered philosophy only in college, they may not have taken a lot of philosophy courses prior to taking PHIL 194. We are not therefore always assessing students at the end of their career in the philosophy department and therefore may not be assessing the full impact of our courses on these students.</p> <p>The current plan of assessment also does not track student progress over time and so does not provide a very good picture of how much improvement students are making the course of work through the major.</p>
What mechanisms will you use to share these results with program faculty?	They will be discussed at a meeting of the faculty.

What changes in the program do these findings suggest?	Given the relatively unstructured nature of our program and the limitations of the assessment as discussed above, the results are not that surprising. It is unlikely that the department will be moved to make the program more structured and without such structure it is hard to see how we could implement an assessment that would provide real information about how the students improve through the program.
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3.c Notes for the Next Assessment Cycle