SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: Philosophy Major	Department: Philosophy
Degree or Certificate Level: BA	College/School: CAS
Date (Month/Year): 9/23	Primary Assessment Contact: Scott Ragland (Dept. Chair)
In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 22-23	
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.

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 9 majors this year (1 in the fall and 8 in the spring) and feedback forms were completed by faculty for 5 of those students. The results are attached if you want to look at the details. Here is a summary.

Based on a point assignment of 1 point for "did not meet expectations," two points for "met expectations," and three points for "exceeded expectations," an average score of 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 the last two years:

	20/21	21/22	22/23
Use of Logic:	2.3	2	3
Analyzes and Defends a Position:	2.3	2	2.2
Gathers Sources:	2.3	2	2.2
Interprets Sources:	2.3	2	2.2
Synthesizes Sources:	2.3	2	2.2

In 19/20, we had 6 completed forms for the 15 students who did the senior inquiry. In 20/21 we had 11 forms completed for 14 students graduating. Last year we were 1 for 6, and this year few got data for 5 of the nine graduates

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions
What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

What we learned about student learning:
1. The students measured met 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. Due to the department conducting two faculty searches last year (one with 400 applicants), the faculty were once again not able to follow up on these remarks from a prior report:

> . . . there is something important to learn from the one student who failed to meet expectations on the three outcomes related to handing 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. Some faculty admitted 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 once 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. However, no action was taken. They also agreed to change the final oral presentations from papers to posters. The change to a "poster session" format in Spring 23 was quite successful. The new UG coordinator is planning to use that format again.

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. In 20/21, the participation rate bounced back to 11/14. Last year, 1 out of 6: the worst year yet for faculty participation in the process. During the current assessment cycle, the faculty participation rate was better (5 out of 9), but still leaves a lot to be desired.

6. **Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of <u>Current</u> Assessment Findings**
   A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

   These results were discussed at a faculty meeting on Sept. 29, 2023, There was a long discussion where faculty debated the pros and cons of either (1) creating a senior seminar course vs (2) keeping the current system but designing a "common syllabus" for senior inquiry. The faculty opted for the "common syllabus" option. The chair and undergrad coordinator will assemble a team over the summer of 24 to create this syllabus.

   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: Review by university assessment officials completed in 21/22 suggests we can continue to use the same rubric. However, the methods we have been using to gather the data are clearly unreliable and need to change.

Last year, we moved the responsibility of gathering assessment data from being a responsibility of the department chair alone, to being shared by a committee. The Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies, Chair, and department administrator met during the last week of classes in each semester to discuss and identify exactly which steps need to be taken to gather assessment data, and to divide out duties among the three of them. They identified relevant faculty and made sure they had the rubric surveys before they started grading, and were aware of the need to complete them while they are reviewing the student work anyway. This will made the data gathering more efficient because faculty did not have to read student work twice (once for grading, then later for assessment). We saw a significant uptick in faculty participation under this new system, but there is still room for improvement.

Curriculum: Senior Seminar? Summer assessment committee for pay? Other ideas?

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

7. **Closing the Loop: Review of <u>Previous</u> 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 first to the pandemic and then due to staffing related logistical issues, we did not follow through on that yet (we didn't have presentations at all the last two years). This change was successfully implemented in 22/23. We plan to try it again in 23/24.

   Assessment Changes: Previous reports identified the need to put in place better mechanisms to ensure faculty were reminded to complete assessment surveys. The plan adopted last year improved things significantly.

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

The change to a poster-presentation format for the end-of-year event was assessed via faculty discussion.
. The changes to data-gathering prompting procedures were assessed throgh the completion of this report.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

Most were generally pleased with the poster format and wanted to try it again **this year to be sure.**

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.