

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: Philosophy Major	Department: Philosophy
Degree or Certificate Level: BA	College/School: CAS
Date (Month/Year): 9/22	Primary Assessment Contact: Scott Ragland (Dept. Chair)
In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 21-22	
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 6 majors this year (3 in the fall and 11 in the spring) and feedback forms were completed by faculty for 1 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:

	20/21 Academic Year	21/22 Academic Year
Use of Logic:	2.2	2
Analyzes and Defends a Position:	2.2	2
Gathers Sources:	2.3	2
Interprets Sources:	2.3	2
Synthesizes Sources:	2.3	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. This year we are 1 for 6, a significantly lower rate of 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. The one student 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 pandemic-related logistical problems, the faculty were not able to follow up in AY 21 or 22 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. However, because of pandemic restrictions, we did not hold final presentations at all in spring 2021 or 2022, so we will have to see how that change works out this year. The two bullet options above will be further discussed in faculty meetings during 22/23.

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. This year, 1 out of 6: the worst year yet for faculty participation in the process.

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?

These results were discussed at a faculty meeting on Sept. 9, 2022, where we focused on the question of faculty participation (see below). The question of amending senior inquiry will be discussed again in Nov or Dec of 2022 at a faculty meeting.

- 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.

When the philosophy faculty discussed this problem at the 9/9/22 meeting, we addressed the possible causes of the problem and also agreed on a possible solution. During the meeting, two sources of the low faculty participation became clear. First, a single faculty member identified himself as being director of several of the philosophy major capstone projects, and said that he did not complete the assessment surveys when prompted because he views them as “onerous”. Second, a more fundamental structural problem emerged. In recent years the task of remembering to prompt faculty to complete assessment surveys has belonged to the chair alone (with help from the department admin—when the chair remembers to ask for it). Because the time for prompting is near the end of term, a time typically extremely busy for department chairs (as for all faculty), the chair has not been reliable at remembering to prompt all relevant faculty.

The solution we are implementing for this year: the Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies, Chair, and department administrator will meet during the last week of classes 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. By spreading the labor around, this plan makes the job easier to carry out in a hectic time, and by having three people reminded to start planning instead of just one, the system is less fragile. This meeting has already been scheduled for fall 22 and will be scheduled in advance every semester going forward. After the chair, CUS, and admin meet, they will identify relevant faculty and make sure they have the rubric surveys before they start grading, and are aware of the need to complete them while they are reviewing the student work anyway. This will make the data gathering even more efficient because faculty will not have to read student work twice (once for grading, then later for assessment).

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 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). **We will follow through on that change this year.**

Assessment Changes: Previous reports identified the need to put in place better mechanisms to ensure faculty were reminded to complete assessment surveys. The chair adopted the plan of setting calendar reminders for

himself in advance so he would remember to prompt faculty. That plan was tried in 21/22 and as you can see, the results were not good. This year we are trying a different solution.

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

Because they have not yet been implemented, the change to senior inquiry presentation have not been assessed. The changes to data-gathering prompting procedures were assessed through the completion of this report, including the department discussion at the 9/9/22 meeting.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

The procedures to prompt data-gathering used last year are not reliable and need to be changed.

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.
See next page**

Senior Inquiry Rubric

Please assess the student's senior inquiry project by answering the questions below.

Student Name

Noah T. Elbert

Professor Name (You)

J. C. Marler

Term and Year

Fall 2021

Did the student correctly employ principles of logical reasoning in philosophical analysis?

- Meets Expectations: 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.
- Fails to Meet Expectations: Student fails to identify fallacies in the reasoning of others discussed in the paper, or the student's own argumentation is logically flawed.
- Exceeds Expectations: 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.

Did the student analyze and defend a philosophical position on a philosophical problem?

- Meets Expectations: Student clearly articulates a philosophical problem, takes a clear position on that problem, and defends own position against relevant and plausible lines of criticism.
- Fails to Meet Expectations: 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.
- Exceeds Expectations: Student's grasp of the problem, novelty of position, or depth of analysis and sophistication of argumentation are commensurate with graduate or professional status.

Did the student gather sources relevant to a philosophical problem?

- Meets Expectations: Student includes all and only relevant primary and secondary sources. and accurately interprets those writings. The student's paper is a good snapshot of the current state of discussion.
- Fails to Meet Expectations: Student fails to include necessary sources for the topic or includes irrelevant sources.
- Exceeds Expectations: Student includes groundbreaking research into primary sources or synthesizes information in novel ways that advance the current discussion of the topic.

Did the student interpret sources relevant to a philosophical problem?

- Meets Expectations: Student's interpretation of sources is accurate and plausible on all significant points.
- Fails to Meet Expectations: Student significantly misinterprets sources
- Exceeds Expectations: Student offers a compelling interpretation of sources that is novel or groundbreaking in some way.

Did the student synthesize sources relevant to a philosophical problem?

- Meets Expectations: 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.
- Fails to Meet Expectations: 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.
- Exceeds Expectations: 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.

Do you have any further comments to add regarding the student's senior inquiry project?

Mr. Elbert's Senior Enquiry was devoted to the deplorably underworked field of philosophy and consolation for which the secondary literature, in any European language, is remarkably thin. He did an excellent piece of work by which to show that the context in which philosophy may be the source of consolation resides within the virtue and the practice of friendship. I think his essay could be read as an excursus preliminary to a lengthier study.