

Department of Philosophy & Humanities
Program Review 2010

OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN

It is commonly agreed¹ that the contents and skills learnt in philosophy courses are particularly hard to measure, especially by the kind of metrics available in academic outcome assessment (OA) tests. This is not because philosophical skills and contents are vague or esoteric, but because they are of a *foundational* nature. Philosophy provides the elemental skills and contents that are crucial and fundamental to the building of a sound knowledge structure. Philosophy is a discipline that allows our students to become original, conscientious, and rigorous thinkers in whichever field or practice they eventually choose as their own.

PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOME ASSESSMENT

PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOME GOALS

Our Philosophy & Humanities Programmatic Outcome Goals (POG) are the following:

Goal 1 -- Content. The understanding of historically important philosophical positions.

Goal 2 -- Values. The cultivation of the set of values, attitudes, and habits of mind that will translate into intellectual openness, humility, and the development of a sensitivity to the complexity behind most issues.

Goal 3 -- Skills. The engendering of critical thinking rigor within and outside the classroom.

METRICS

We will measure the POG's above through the following metrics:

Metric 1. Ability to identify and critically analyze arguments (Goals 2 & 3).

Metric 2. Ability to identify and define key philosophical positions (Goal 1).

Metric 3. Ability to identify and apply these positions to contemporary issues (Goals 1; 2; & 3).

TOOLS

A combination of outcomes assessment tools should disclose our Programs' strengths and weaknesses. Departmental meetings at the beginning and at the end of each semester will be devoted to analyze our OA's results and plan adaptively for the future.

INDIRECT OA TOOLS

COURSEWORK

The final grade in our philosophy courses is an indirect outcome assessment of the three metrics combined. A completion with at least a C grade in the required sequence, for our majors, should indicate that they have achieved the minimum outcome level required.

DIRECT OA TOOLS

ENTRANCE & EXIT QUESTIONNAIRES

Students in all of our courses will complete one entrance questionnaire and one exit questionnaire. The questionnaires will consist of three GRE-type questions per metric (nine questions total). Each course's instructor will enter questionnaire results into a standardized spreadsheet form. By the end of each semester, our Administrative assistant will pool entrance and exit questionnaires' data into a master spreadsheet that will allow us to follow each metric in different ways. Importantly, it will provide us with a direct measure of the

¹ See, for instance, the American Philosophical Association's statement on OA at http://www.apaonline.org/documents/governance/APA_Outcomes_2008.pdf

three metrics progression for our majors, and non-majors. These metrics' progression will allow us to assess the dual duty of our program: our majors' and minors' performance, and our service to other disciplines (through the performance of all non-majors).

CAPSTONE COURSE

The completion with at least a C final grade in our (Honors) optional B.A. Thesis (PHIL 499W); or a C average for all philosophy 400 level courses combined should also provide an alternative, direct measure of whether or not they have achieved the minimum outcome level required.

PREVIOUS OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLANS

We have not maintained the OA plan proposed in our last Program Review, as we have had severe faculty reductions in the Department, from five to only two full time faculty members. But our enrollments have remained high, and the number of majors has been fairly constant, with a gradual increase over the past five years (27, 26, 28, 28, 29). We have been at capacity offering the required courses for the program and handling advising for our majors and minors to graduate on schedule. Implementation of our previous OA plan proved to require greater resources than we had available. With a more practicable plan proposed, and the addition in 2010 of another tenure-track faculty member, Dr. Alicia Hall, the department now has the bare minimum to cover OA, but we are still inadequately staffed in terms of programmatic requirements. (For example, we continue to rely on emeritus faculty teaching for free to cover the requirement PHIL 202 *Introduction to Eastern Philosophy*.)

PROSPECTIVE NEEDS & PLACEMENT

The idea of job placement and market needs does not apply to philosophy undergraduate programs directly. This, however, is not to say that philosophy undergraduate programs have no impact on graduate production and placement. As argued above, the three POG's outlined above are essential and universal in terms of market needs, and all other things being equal, will enhance the placement prospects of our majors, and those of the wider academic community we serve.²

More employers in fields such as business and healthcare have been recognizing the value of a philosophy degree. The Council for Industry and Higher Education, a UK network of business and higher education executives, worked with employers to develop a comprehensive profile of which in-demand skills are developed through the study of particular disciplines. The official guide for employers developed by the CIHE states that "Philosophy students will develop general skills like the ability to think logically, analyse critically, communicate articulately and accurately, both orally and in writing. These are the skills that employers indicate are so important for middle management and leadership roles. The skills of vision, creativity and analytical power developed through the study of Philosophy will have a premium." They also state that, "Studying formal logic helps students acquire skills... [that] are of immediate value in computer and information management careers and in all contexts where precision, clarity, and high level abstract planning and analysis are required." (CIHE, *Degrees of Skill: Student Employability Profiles*. Available at <http://www.cihe.co.uk/degrees-of-skill-student-employability-profiles/>)

² For more on this, see, for instance, the University of Florida's Philosophy Department's needs-and-placement statement at: <http://www.phil.ufl.edu/ugrad/ugcrhbk.html>.