

Philosophy Program Assessment Plan
May 2014
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Program Mission Statement:

The Philosophy Program at Wells College engages students in a conversation (or conversations) – of ancient and venerable pedigree – about basic questions of human existence. Through their study of and participation in these conversations, students develop and sharpen crucial tools of critical thinking and logic. With these tools – a starter kit for self-creation – students come to realize more their own point of view on things, cultivate their own values, and develop a much greater appreciation of complexity and difference. Often a student’s journey to self-understanding, a deeply meaningful life, and the formation of an individual identity begins with a jarring encounter with otherness. It is much better to go through this process, then, in community with others, and in a diverse community founded on respect, freedom of speech and conscience, with a shared commitment to discovery and truth, and openness to new ways of knowing. This is what we emphasize and promote in Philosophy. All veterans of our Program gladly acknowledge as well that the passionate pursuit of wisdom in all its various forms is challenging and never a completed task. However, it’s also deeply rewarding and mind expanding. Therefore, the stance of ‘learner’ or ‘student’ necessarily becomes a lifelong orientation to others, oneself, and the world.

Program Goals:

1. Each graduate of the Philosophy program will be a proficient logical and critical thinker, who uses these skills with appreciation and sympathy for the perspectives and sensitivities of others, and to enhance the quality of human relationships and human life.
2. Graduates also will be able imaginatively to articulate a personal, rationally coherent ethical perspective, which is responsive to the views and concerns of others (past, present, and future).
3. Wells’ students of the discipline of Philosophy will be informed about fundamental issues of mind and human identity, such as, the mind-body relation, free will, life after death, the nature of consciousness, and other issues of human psychology and belief. They will add to this expertise an understanding of how these issues pertain to pressing personal, societal and environmental issues – where we need to see our place in the ecosystem as *a* place, not *the* place.
4. Graduates will appreciate the inner-connectedness of various human pursuits of knowledge and self-understanding, and how these enhance and complicate the quest for truth and knowledge, and even a meaningful life.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be competent in the use of basic principles of propositional logic and common forms of informal rational argument.
2. Students will demonstrate an ability to consider alternative and competing points of view, and what may be gained by viewing objectivity as thoughtful intersubjectivity.
3. Students will be able to articulate an ethical perspective that is informed by and responsive to the major ethical traditions of humankind, so far.
4. Students will demonstrate an ability to reflect on, grapple with, and reasonably appreciate the values, basic commitments, perspectives, and biases they inherited through socialization, and how their own values and beliefs will, in turn, impact future human beings.
5. Students will demonstrate basic competency in the philosophy of mind and human nature.
6. Students will articulate a view of how human beings fit or don't fit into the larger animal and living world, the evolution of life and consciousness, and possible worlds unseen. How also do our actions impact our children and their children in regard to the climate they will inherit from us?
7. Students will demonstrate broad competence concerning important concepts in or related to mind, human psychology, ethics, philosophy of religion, and the history of philosophy.
8. Students will demonstrate abilities to discuss and write about basic philosophical topics in ways that are clear, precise, and cogent.

Measurable Learning Outcomes:

We will measure learning outcomes in a number of ways, insofar as they are measurable at all. Since I am going on sabbatical for the Fall semester, I will offer a fuller draft, with more specifics, in this section once I have returned and have discussed all this with several recent graduates, Mike Gorr, and a few other colleagues.

1. Every student who graduates from the Wells College Philosophy Program will pass a course in propositional logic and critical thinking – Phil 114. In this course, in order to pass it, each student must pass objective logic exams administered in the course.
2. Each course other than Phil 114, including Phil 100, will require students to write philosophical essays in which they discuss and evaluate the views of others and their own views.
3. All students in the Philosophy program will pass a course in Philosophical Ethics (Phil 240), which includes basic competency exams and writing assignments.
4. Henceforth, all teaching evaluations of courses in Philosophy, both full-time and adjunct, will be collected solely for assessment purposes. (All affected faculty will be informed.)
5. Students will prepare senior position papers in which they articulate their own perspectives in conversation with the major figures and paradigms in Philosophy, concerning the following issues –
 - a. What is a good life and what role do morality, wisdom, and knowledge play in living such a life?
 - b. Consider the values and beliefs with which you entered the Philosophy program. How have your views evolved over time and on account of your training in Philosophy? Be specific. Are your views more complicated, or less?
6. Each student will take and pass Phil 331: Mind. In this course, each will be required to pass exams on central issues and concepts in philosophy of mind.
7. All students of the Philosophy Program will take and pass a course in human psychology.
8. Currently, all students in the Philosophy Program must complete a thesis in Philosophy during the spring semester of their senior year.
 - * This requirement may be discontinued.
 - * It may remain an option for those who anticipate going to graduate school.

Means of Assessment of Outcomes:

I will meet with Mike Gorr when I return from sabbatical in the Fall to plan for the collection of papers and exams from our courses. Also, we will discuss by email before that time how to begin the process of collecting and comparing the work of students from the beginning to the end of their Wells' academic careers.

How Assessment Data will be Utilized:

For now, the plan will be to collect exams and papers from Mike Gorr's classes in the Fall, and all evaluations and course assignments for Philosophy courses for the year. In the spring, upon my return, Mike and I will discuss with the input of others, of course, how to pursue more and better assessment practices and strategies.