

Philosophy Program Assessment Plan
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* I revised the Major and course offerings in Philosophy in very significant ways during the spring semester. In view of these thoroughgoing changes and the incomplete and partially inapplicable aspects of previous assessment plans and reports for the Philosophy program, this plan represents a fresh start, a complete reboot.

Program Mission Statement:

Philosophy is an ongoing and rigorous conversation about basic questions of the human condition. It spans across a great variety of cultures and time periods, and encompasses very diverse methods of inquiry and forms of creative expression.

The major in philosophy seeks to stay true to the ancient conception of philosophy as the passionate pursuit of wisdom, while celebrating and exploring the more inclusive, expansive, and multidisciplinary nature of contemporary philosophy. Philosophy sharpens and cultivates our unique abilities to think in subtle, creative, and very complex ways, and to communicate our thoughts and feelings to others. The philosophy program focuses especially on philosophy's connections to ethics, social justice, consciousness and the mind, art, and religion. It also helps students to integrate the knowledge that they acquire from a variety of often-fragmented sources and disciplines.

Program Goal #1:

Students of Philosophy at Wells will become better logical and critical thinkers and writers.

Learning Objectives for Program Goal #1:

1. Students will enhance their abilities as writers to explicate and evaluate arguments and perspectives clearly and concisely.
2. Students will demonstrate competence in elementary logic and basic canons of critical and inclusive thinking.

Measurable Learning Outcomes:

1. For Learning Objective #1:
 - A. Students will complete papers and exams that require them to explain and critically evaluate arguments from various perspectives.
 - B. Students will be responsible for leading the class' discussion and evaluation of some aspect of the course material, and will be required to submit their presentations in brief written outline form.
2. For Learning Objective #2:
 - A. Students will complete papers and exams in which they demonstrate the ability to do basic logical analysis of arguments and perspectives.
 - B. Students will participate in class discussions that require critical and inclusive thinking. Student also will be required to lead such a discussion once during the semester.

Means of Assessment of Outcomes:

These outcomes will be measured in particular writing assignments across various philosophy courses. The first and fourth papers (from these assignments) from five randomly selected students in each course selected will be compared. The criterion for success will be improvement in writing skills and clarity, and in argument comprehension and explanation. A better grade on the fourth assignment, as opposed to the first, might be indicative of success, but not necessarily.

Also, student discussion facilitations will be collected and graded. An overall average of 80% for the class on this assignment will be the criterion for success, for this component.

Program Goal #2:

Students of Philosophy will enhance their ability to articulate a broad, informed and coherent ethical perspective that is responsive to the views and concerns of others.

Learning Objectives for Program Goal #2:

1. Students will learn how to think about ethics from a variety of points of view.
2. Students will learn about the various ethical values in question in human relationships and in our broader connections to other animals and the environment itself.

Measurable Learning Outcomes:

1. For Learning Objective #1:
 - A. Students will complete papers, exams and class presentations on ethics from a variety of philosophical and other disciplinary perspectives.
 - B. Students will encounter and engage ethical perspectives from other cultures and other periods in history, and from the “margins” of our own society.
2. For Learning Objective #2:
 - A. Students will complete papers and exams that require competency in basic aspects of environmental ethics.
 - B. Students will complete papers and exams on ethical issues and perspectives from other cultures and time periods, as well as from marginalized groups in our own society.

Means of Assessment of Outcomes:

For each Philosophy course that is mainly focused on ethics (e.g., Phil 240): one writing assignment from the course will be evaluated with regard to reaching these outcomes. A rubric will be created for this evaluation that focuses specifically on the objectives listed above. Also, a questionnaire will be distributed at the end of the course that asks students to address how their ethical views and lives have been changed by the course.

All other courses in Philosophy, with the exception of Phil 114, will have a component in which ethical issues related to the course topic are explored. For example, in Mind (Phil 331), we consider how our new understanding of the brain and our own biological and social evolution should shape our communal and ecological values. In each such course, one writing assignment on the intersection of ethical issues with the topic of the course will be given and then evaluated with the same rubric noted above.

Program Goal #3:

Students of Philosophy will better integrate the various kinds of knowledge they acquire in college.

Learning Objectives for Program Goal #3:

1. Students will learn about how scientific, anthropological, psychological, religious and philosophical perspectives on humanity and our place in the larger world compare and how they might be integrated or related to each other
2. Students will be able to articulate how current leading perspectives on the human condition are related.

Measurable Learning Outcomes:

1. For Learning Objective #1:

A. Students will complete readings and assignments in which they engage basic questions of human existence from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

B. Students will complete exams that require them to articulate ways in which, for instance, our evolutionary history is related to and helps to explain many aspects of our psychology – and other connections or disconnections between what may seem to be competing disciplines or perspectives.

2. For Learning Objective #2:

A. Students will complete reading and writing assignments in which they explain, compare and evaluate different and often competing views on basic questions of human nature and the place of our species in the larger world.

B. Students will complete class presentations and exams on basic models of how we understand ourselves, and how we might integrate or further distinguish aspects of these models.

Means of Assessment of Outcomes:

Each course in Philosophy, with the exception of Phil 114, will introduce students to at least one other disciplinary perspective (outside of Philosophy) on the main topic(s) of the course. In Mind (Phil 331), one assignment will be focused on comparison and possible integration of evolutionary, psychological, philosophical and religious perspectives on a central topic in mind. An overall student average of 75% on this assignment will be considered a marker of success. The same procedure will be followed in regard to Philosophy of Religion (Phil 300), Belief and Knowledge (Phil 325) and Philosophy of Art (Phil 329).

Program Goal #4:

Students of Philosophy will learn about how art, film and other forms of media provide different ways to explore philosophical questions and to communicate basic and subtle ideas.

Learning Objectives for Program Goal #4:

1. Students will learn about the ways Philosophy and philosophical questions are implicated by and connect with various kinds of art and film.
2. Students will learn how to approach literary texts, films and other genres of human expression from a philosophical perspective, or with a view to their philosophical themes.

Measurable Learning Outcomes:

1. For Learning Objective #1:

A. Students will complete reading and writing assignments that focus on the interrelations between philosophy and art.

B. Students will complete reading and writing assignments that focus on the interrelations between philosophy and film (and other similar media).

2. For Learning Objective #2:

A. Students will engage and write about various literary works from a philosophical perspective.

B. Students will complete papers and class presentations in which they analyze films and other media through a philosophical lens.

Means of Assessment of Outcomes

For Philosophy courses that are mainly about Philosophy and Art or Philosophy and Film (Phil 329 or the new course, Phil 250), all class presentations and one writing assignment will be assessed in terms of the objectives stated above. I will create a rubric for this assessment to be used for these courses. In other Philosophy courses, one writing assignment that has some connection to philosophy and literature, music, art or film, in the course, will be assessed in view of the outcome goals noted above. An overall class average of 80% will be considered a successful outcome. For instance, for Phil 245 (Meaning), an assignment on Camus' *The Stranger* will be given and if the overall class average is at 80% or above, then the course will have reached this goal.

How Assessment Data will be Utilized:

The data gathered in this assessment will be used to modify further the Philosophy program so as to make it maximally supportive of the Wells College's curriculum and our core values as an institution. The data will play an important role in assessing the efficacy of the new courses in Philosophy and the overall redesign. A basic goal also is to make the Major in Philosophy and philosophy courses in general as interdisciplinary and as accessible to the Wells community as possible.