I. NEW OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN

Overview: The new OA plan involves quantitative data collection and annual evaluation of that data. The plan includes both direct and indirect methods of assessment, both primary and secondary assessment instruments, and is designed to yield a more comprehensive set of measures than our previous primary instrument (the two-course senior thesis research and writing, and the thesis defense). The new plan evaluates student performance across a full range of criteria, showing relative strengths and weaknesses in different areas. The combination of OA instruments demonstrate both student learning and program performance in achieving expected outcomes.
Evaluation of student learning outcomes is systematic and quantified according to established standards both within UAF and along national guidelines.

The plan provides for an Assessment Committee of at least two department faculty members, charged with (1) reviewing syllabi, assignments and course development; (2) evaluation of student portfolios and senior theses for content knowledge, technical facility in analysis and argumentation, research and scholarship standards, and communications skills; (3) analysis of the year’s entrance and exit interviews and checklists/scorecards, and monitoring trends in the collected data; and (4) reporting the committee’s evaluation and results in the Annual Outcomes Assessment Report to the Dean of CLA and the Vice Provost’s office.

II. MAIN OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR THE PROGRAM

In our service and elective courses for students of all majors, the department and program aim to foster and encourage “independence of thought and action in the pursuit of knowledge,” one of the core values expressed in the draft UAF Strategic Plan 2010. Broadly, we expect students in our classes to learn to think and write more clearly, to read closely and critically, and to reason cogently. For philosophy majors these student learning outcomes are articulated in the following objectives for the program:

- Students will be trained in methods of scholarly inquiry, research and problem solving.
- Students will acquire the abilities to read, evaluate and respond critically to intellectual material from any discipline.
- Students will learn to recognize and critically assess premises and conclusions, to identify main theses and evaluate supporting evidence.
- Students will learn to organize and to develop material in a well-reasoned manner, to communicate ideas clearly with adequate definition and illustration.
- Students will learn to recognize what constitutes relevant material and support for ideas.
- Students will acquire the skills to write effectively about philosophy and other subjects.
- Students will become familiar with research techniques in philosophy.
- Students will develop a critical understanding of major philosophical figures, traditions and ideas, including comparative philosophy.
- Students will explore and critically assess the work of central figures in the history of philosophy, including study of the Indian and Chinese traditions.
• Students will explore and understand the historical development of major philosophical ideas, including theories of truth, knowledge, reality, value, morality, consciousness, etc.
• Students will have some experience in the principles and procedures of formal logic, as well as practice in informal reasoning.
• Students planning to go to graduate school will develop an appropriate writing sample of 20-25 pages.

This is a long list, because the plan is designed to be comprehensive, but it is not unrealistic. Of course, some of these objectives are more concrete and quantifiable, and some are more abstract. But each of these outcomes can be measured to a significant extent by one or more of the OA instruments. Most of the combined measures yield numbers: averages, totals, grades, scores. These data can be easily summarized and interpreted, and trends can readily be identified. The comprehensive analysis and assessment of each major (coursework, senior portfolio, entrance & exit interviews) ensures that the multiple objectives and expected outcomes of the program are measured and monitored.

Coursework is fundamental to OA (see “Instruments of Outcomes Assessment,” below). The requirements for the philosophy major reflect the outcomes expected, and the means by which we expect to achieve the program’s departmental and institutional objectives. Direct assessment of student breadth and depth of coursework is built into the requirements for the major: if these courses have been taken successfully (a grade of C or better), the outcome is considered to have been measured affirmatively. The department has established its curriculum based on a consensus of participating faculty regarding standards of competence appropriate to a B.A. degree program.

1. Upper-level coursework in the various areas of philosophy
2. A course in formal logic
3. An introduction to non-Western philosophy
4. An introduction to a non-English language
5. A foundation in the history of philosophy from ancient to early modern
6. Advanced coursework with concentration in one or more areas of interest

The following revised program description details the new requirements, and indicates the kinds of courses department faculty have developed to produce expected student learning outcomes.
III. PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE PHILOSOPHY MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

1. Complete the general university requirements.
2. Complete the B.A. degree requirements.
3. Complete 1 year of non-English language study at the college level.*
4. Complete the following program (major) requirements:**
   
   a. Complete the following:
      
      • PHIL 102—Introduction to Philosophy 3 credits
      • PHIL 104—Logic and Reasoning 3 credits
      • PHIL 202—Introduction to Eastern Philosophy 3 credits
      • PHIL 351—History of Ancient Greek Philosophy 3 credits
      • PHIL 352—History of Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant 3 credits
      • PHIL 471—Contemporary Philosophical Problems 3 credits
   
   b. Complete 5 of the following electives:
      
      • PHIL 108—Science, Critical Thinking and Pseudoscience 3 credits
      • PHIL 110—Introduction to Political Philosophy 3 credits
      • PHIL 322X—Ethics*** 3 credits
      • PHIL 341O—Theories of Knowledge 3 credits
      • PHIL 342—Theories of Reality 3 credits
      • PHIL 361—Philosophy in Literature 3 credits
      • PHIL 362—Feminist Philosophy 3 credits
      • PHIL 363—Philosophy of Religion 3 credits
      • PHIL 380—Conceptual Foundations of Science 3 credits
      • PHIL 381—Topics in Logics 3 credits
      • PHIL 382—Science and Technological Limits 3 credits
      • PHIL 393—Special Topics 3 credits
      • PHIL 402—Biomedical Ethics 3 credits
      • PHIL 411W,O—Classical Political Theory 3 credits
      • PHIL 412W—Modern Political Theory 3 credits
      • PHIL 417—Social Theory and Public Policy 3 credits
      • PHIL 421—Aesthetics 3 credits
      • PHIL 436—Ethical Theory 3 credits
      • PHIL 472—Ethics in International Affairs 3 credits
      • PHIL 476—Ethics and Public Policy I 3 credits
      • PHIL 477—Ethics and Public Policy II 3 credits
      • PHIL 481—Philosophy of Science 3 credits
      • PHIL 482—Comparative Philosophy and Religions 3 credits
Annual OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT REPORT

- PHIL 483—Philosophy of Social Science 3 credits
- PHIL 485—Topics in Comparative Philosophies 3 credits
- PHIL 487—Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Biology 3 credits
- PHIL 493—Special Topics 3 credits
- PHIL 499W—B.A. Thesis in Philosophy [Honors Option] 3 credits

5. Compile Senior Portfolio.

(For departmental honors: take PHIL 499W, research and write senior thesis, complete an oral defense of thesis as administered by the department faculty.)

6. Minimum credits required 130.

Minor

1. Complete the following:
   - PHIL 102—Introduction to Philosophy 3 credits
   - PHIL 351—History of Ancient Greek Philosophy 3 credits
   - PHIL 352—History of Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant 3 credits
   - PHIL elective at the 400-level 3 credits

2. Complete 2 of the following:
   - PHIL 104—Logic and Reasoning 3 credits
   - PHIL 202—Introduction to Eastern Philosophy 3 credits
   - PHIL 322X—Ethics*** 3 credits
   - PHIL 341O—Theories of Knowledge 3 credits
   - PHIL 342—Theories of Reality 3 credits
   - PHIL/PS 411W,O—Classical Political Theory 3 credits
   - PHIL/PS 412W—Modern Political Theory 3 credits
   - PHIL 421—Aesthetics 3 credits
   - PHIL 472—Ethics in International Affairs 3 credits
   - PHIL 481—Philosophy of Science 3 credits
   - PHIL 482—Comparative Philosophy and Religions 3 credits
   - PHIL 483—Philosophy of Social Science 3 credits
   - PHIL 485—Topics in Comparative Philosophies 3 credits

3. Minimum credits required 18

* Non-English language may be used to meet general degree requirements.

** Student must earn a C grade or better in each course.

*** PHIL 322X may not be counted toward a philosophy major or minor if used to fulfill core requirements.
IV. INSTRUMENTS OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

Expected outcomes and the achievement of program objectives are measured by four methods:

1. Coursework
   (See requirements and course lists, section III above)

Embedded outcomes assessment is standard practice in philosophy courses. Syllabi and course outlines typically contain descriptions of what students are expected to learn in a course, the kinds of skills and competencies they are expected to demonstrate, and the nature of the instruments that will be used in assessing a student’s demonstration of knowledge, skill, and competence. Outcomes normally are measured in philosophy courses by examinations and other written assignments that test whether students have mastered the objectives appropriate for the course and its level. Established methods of testing and grading remain the primary method of direct assessment within philosophy & humanities courses, including term papers, in-class exams, essays, presentations, Q&A, response papers, etc. For the coursework component, each of the department’s expected outcomes is directly measured with letter grades for the course: students receiving a C or better in the required sequence for majors are considered to have met at least the minimum outcome expected.

2. Senior Portfolio & Faculty Checklist/Scorecard
   (See description and checklist/scorecard, VII.1a-1b below)

As an individual instrument, evaluation of the senior portfolio is now the department’s primary method of OA for the philosophy major. The Assessment Committee will review student portfolios and score them according to a number of standardized criteria. This will yield meaningful numbers for quantitative analysis. Comparing the aggregate and average scores over three or four semesters should show trends, successes and areas of concern. Faculty will maintain a reasonable and standard level of expectation.

3. Entrance Interview/questionnaire & Exit Interview/questionnaire for Majors
   (See included forms, VII.3a-3b below)

The department chair or other authorized faculty member will conduct entrance interviews with new majors and exit interviews with graduating seniors. The standardized forms will be collected and processed. The department assessment committee will review results each semester and report
annually. (The next step will be including minors in this process, and the forms will be adapted accordingly.)

4. Senior thesis as an honors option (recommended for graduate study)
(See description and checklist/scorecard, VII.2a-2b below)

V. CONCLUSIONS BASED ON PREVIOUS OA INSTRUMENTS

Prior to 2005 the primary OA instrument was a senior course sequence, PHIL 488 and PHIL 499W, senior thesis research and writing, with an oral defense of the thesis. (Comprehensive oral examinations had also been part of the requirements, early in the review period, but were dropped.) The thesis as OA plan was suspended in March 2005, in the department chair’s Annual Outcomes Assessment Report, pending reconsideration in program review. The department’s experience with the thesis has shown that it is not an effective primary instrument. The expected length of the senior thesis has been scaled back several times over the past five years of the program. Previous expectations were also higher in terms of exposition of philosophical text, reconstruction of arguments, and critical analysis. Students have shown continuing problems with elements of style, grammar and the quality of their writing in general. The oral defense of the thesis likewise has generally not met expectations. According to the March 2005 report suspending the thesis as OA, “Students do not adequately demonstrate retention of basic logical skills in oral defense even as they do not adequately exhibit such skill in the written theses.” Not every student thesis showed such problems, but in general expectations were clearly not being met. The current department consensus is that the thesis sequence is not appropriate for every philosophy student, and not the best way to assess student learning outcomes. The committee now proposes shifting the thesis to an option for departmental honors, reducing the sequence to one 3-credit course (PHIL 499W), and substituting an additional upper-division philosophy elective (from 4 to 5 total required).

VI. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

We recognize and affirm the need for OA, but we agree with the American Philosophical Association that undergraduate education in philosophy is fundamentally a matter of the cultivation and employment of analytic, interpretive, normative and critical abilities. Philosophy is less content- and technique-specific than most other academic disciplines. The basic aim of education in philosophy is not and should not be primarily to impart information. Rather it is to help students learn to understand various kinds of deeply difficult intellectual problems, to interpret texts regarding
these problems, to analyze and criticize the arguments found in them, and to express themselves in ways that clarify and carry forward reflection upon them. These abilities are to some extent amenable to patterns of outcomes measurement typical of OA, as we have indicated above, but they are not reducible to them. It is not to be expected that student progress in philosophy can either be specified to a degree beyond what is already possible with established OA measures, or given a purely quantitative expression. It is essential that the values inherent in and specific to the process of teaching and learning in philosophy not be lost.

VII. MATERIALS & DESCRIPTIONS:

1a. Philosophy Major Portfolio
1b. Portfolio Checklist & Scorecard

2a. Senior Thesis (Honors Option)
2b. Senior Thesis Checklist & Scorecard

3a. Philosophy Major Entrance Interview Form
3b. Philosophy Major Exit Interview Form

1a. Philosophy Major Portfolio

The primary instrument of OA in the new philosophy program is the senior portfolio. Each major in the program will be required to develop and maintain a portfolio representative of his or her academic work as a philosophy major. Students will include in their portfolio three papers from upper-level philosophy courses and one from another discipline. The three pieces of writing from philosophy courses should cover different areas, e.g. the history of philosophy, value theory, theory of knowledge, metaphysics, etc. These papers will be read and evaluated by the department’s Assessment Committee (a minimum of two faculty members) after the student has completed his or her academic work. Papers will be assessed with regard to students’ understanding of major ideas, the place of these ideas in the discipline of philosophy, and their historical importance. Attention will be given to students’ abilities to write effectively and to maintain the conventions of scholarship. The assessment committee will evaluate the papers according to the following checklist and score card. An expected average score will be somewhere between 2.5 and 3.5; scores below 2 indicate problem areas where all department faculty will have to make more explicit effort. Scores above 3.5 show where faculty and students have been particularly successful. Ongoing analysis of these scores will indicate which specific skills need to be better developed, and faculty will revise coursework to emphasize these areas. Students with scores significantly below 2 will not fail any
course or major requirement, and will still be able to graduate, but the department will have to consider what went wrong in the specific case and how it might be better handled in the future.

Each senior portfolio will therefore have four scorecards from each faculty member on the Assessment Committee, for a minimum total of eight. This should be a broad enough range of factors and ratings to give a fair representation of student work. Our expected outcomes are directly embedded in the portfolio checklist and scorecard; writing papers is the primary activity of undergraduate philosophy, and the standards we expect of our student papers are indicated in clear terms.

1b. Portfolio Checklist & Scorecard

_The following standards are to be used by the Assessment Committee in evaluating portfolios of student papers for the purpose of assessing the Philosophy major. This evaluation is conducted only after submission of grades for all courses in which the papers were written._

Instructions: In each of the following categories rate each paper according to the following scale:

1 = Unacceptable  
2 = Acceptable  
3 = Very Good  
4 = Excellent  
x = Not Applicable

1. The topic of the paper is clear and appropriate.
2. The paper has a clear thesis.
3. Key concepts are clearly defined, analyzed or explained.
4. Clear arguments for the thesis are presented.
5. Possible objections to the thesis are considered and evaluated.
6. Useful examples are provided.
7. The writing is clear and effective.
8. The writing is free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors.
9. The paper demonstrates a sustained philosophical argument.
10. The paper shows familiarity with the philosophical literature relevant to the topic.
11. Footnotes or endnotes are clearly presented.
12. The paper includes an acceptable bibliography.
13. Overall, the author demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.
2a. Senior Thesis (Honors Option)

As an OA instrument, the senior thesis is used to evaluate advanced content knowledge, command of the material, academic ability, written and oral communication skills, and sufficient preparation in written work for advanced study at the graduate level. The thesis will be read and evaluated by all regular department faculty members (a minimum of three). Students will complete an oral defense and examination by the department faculty as part of the thesis project. Senior theses have no precise minimum or maximum required length, but about 20-25 pages is thought to be adequate and the minimum amount necessary to addressing a question of sufficient significance for a senior honors thesis. The area, issue, or philosopher(s) involved will be determined by student interest in consultation with the faculty advisor.

The senior thesis will be evaluated according to the following checklist/scorecard. An expected average score will be somewhere between 2.5 and 3.5; scores below 2 indicate an unsuccessful thesis and/or defense. Scores above 3.5 show where students and their advisors have been particularly successful. Students with scores significantly below 2 will receive credit for PHIL 499W, but not departmental honors.

Each thesis will have a minimum of three checklist/scorecards, as follows:

2b. Senior Thesis Checklist & Scorecard

Instructions: In each of the following categories rate the thesis according to the following scale:

1 = Unacceptable  2 = Acceptable  3 = Very Good  4 = Excellent  x = Not Applicable

_____1. The topic is appropriately chosen and framed for a senior thesis.

_____2. The thesis is clearly articulated.

_____3. Key concepts are clearly defined, analyzed or explained.

_____4. Clear arguments for the thesis are presented.

_____5. Possible objections to the thesis are considered and evaluated.

_____6. Useful examples are provided.

_____7. The writing is clear and effective.
8. The writing is free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors.


10. The thesis shows familiarity with the relevant philosophical sources.

11. Footnotes or endnotes are appropriate and follow conventions of scholarship.

12. The thesis includes a comprehensive bibliography.

13. The thesis demonstrates a thorough understanding of the issue or question.

14. The student was able to explain and defend the thesis orally.

15. The student gave appropriate answers to questions about the thesis.

16. The student gave appropriate answers to questions about the history of philosophy.
3a. Philosophy Major Entrance Interview Form

Welcome to the UAF Philosophy Department!

Each student meets with the Chair of the Department on his or her declaration of the major in Philosophy. Please complete this form prior to your meeting with the Chair. In addition to this form, you must complete a [declaration of major form] and secure the Chair’s signature on it.

Name

Date

Local address

Permanent address

Email address

Phone

Philosophy Courses

(Already completed or currently taking)

When Taken

Instructor

Grade

1. Anticipated date of graduation

2. Do you have (or intend to have) a double major?  ○ Yes  ○ No  If so, what is your other major?

3. Do you have (or intend to have) a minor in another field? If so, what is it?

4. Estimated overall grade point average

5. Who (if you know) would you like to be your faculty advisor in Philosophy?
6. Why did you choose to major in Philosophy? Please be specific: for example, was it a previous course (which?), instructor (who?), interest in area (which?), career plans (what?) etc.

________________________________________________________________________

7. What do you hope to gain from a Philosophy major?

________________________________________________________________________

8. Do you intend to be active in the Socratic Society, UAF’s philosophy student organization?

________________________________________________________________________

9. Which courses or areas of study in Philosophy are you especially looking forward to?

________________________________________________________________________

10. What information can the Department provide now which might be helpful to you (information about the discipline, graduate school, philosophy as a minor, foreign language recommendations, programs, careers, etc.)?

________________________________________________________________________

Comments? ___________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
3b. Philosophy Major Exit Interview Form

Each Philosophy major meets with the Chair of the Department in his or her final semester prior to graduation. Please complete this Exit Interview Form and bring it with you to your meeting with the Department Chair. Thank you and congratulations on your graduation!

Name ________________________________________________________________

Date __________________________ Date of graduation ______________________

Permanent phone (so that we can keep in touch) ____________________________

Permanent address _____________________________________________________

Permanent email address ________________________________________________

Estimated overall grade point average _________________________________

Estimated grade point average in the major ______________________________

Do you have another major besides Philosophy? If so, what is it? ____________

Did you minor in any other fields? If so, which? __________________________

For each of the following questions, circle one of the numbers. Please briefly explain your answer. Use the following scale:

1: strongly disagree
2: disagree
3: neutral
4: agree
5: strongly agree

_____ 1. As a major in Philosophy, I became acquainted with classical philosophical texts.

_____ 2. As a major in Philosophy, I became acquainted with contemporary philosophical texts.

_____ 3. As a major in Philosophy, I learned skills in critically assessing arguments.

_____ 4. As a major in Philosophy, I became a better reader and writer.

_____ 5. I regularly used library resources in connection with my Philosophy courses.

_____ 6. The Philosophy program taught me how to think for myself.

_____ 7. As a major in Philosophy, I have developed a more reflective understanding of my fundamental beliefs and values.
1. Why did you choose to major in Philosophy? Please be specific: for example, was it a particular course (which?), teacher (who?), interest in area (which?), career plans (what?), etc.

2. In what ways were your expectations of the Philosophy major fulfilled (or not fulfilled) by your experiences? Please be specific.

3. Please comment on the quality of teaching in your Philosophy courses (overall rating, strong and weak points, etc.).

4. Please comment on the quality of advising in the Philosophy Department.

5. Did you find the Philosophy Department Offices to be friendly and accessible? Please comment.

6. In how many of your Philosophy courses did you write at least one paper? All, some, none? Did your Philosophy major improve your writing skills? What writing experiences were most and least helpful?

7. Is Philosophy an easy major or a difficult one? In what ways?

8. Were you active in the Socratic Society? Do you have any suggestions for improving it?

9. What are your short-term post-graduation plans?
10. What are your long-range career/life plans and goals?

11. How do you expect your major in Philosophy to help you, either personally or professionally? Can the Department assist in any way?

12. What would you say are the main strengths and weaknesses of the Philosophy program?

13. How can the Philosophy major be improved?

Any other comments? Thank you!
# VIII. PROGRAM REVIEW TABLE 1

## PROGRAM REVIEW TABLE 1 (OA)

Philosophy & Humanities Updated Departmental Notebook  
2000-01 to 2004-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Outcomes Assessment Implementation Summary</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete a separate table for each degree and certificate program</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC YEAR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B.A. in PHILOSOPHY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment information collected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Senior Research & Thesis  
  Oral Comprehensive Exam  
  Thesis Defense |
| Senior Research & Thesis  
  Oral Comprehensive Exam  
  Thesis Defense |
| Senior Research & Thesis  
  Thesis Defense |
| Senior Research & Thesis  
  Thesis Defense |
| Conclusions drawn from information |
| Performance was mixed and generally below expectation, according to all three measures |
| Same |
| Performance was mixed and generally below expectation, according to both measures |
| Curricular changes resulting from conclusions |
| None |
| • Reduce expected thesis length  
  • Eliminate oral comprehensive exams |
| None |
| • Discussed need to revise OA plan |
| • Outcomes Assessment plan suspended, pending revision as part of 2005-2006 Program Review process; revised plan included in Departmental Notebook and in Part 3 of the Program Review materials. |
IX. UPDATED DEPARTMENTAL NOTEBOOK: OA

The following are the OA-related sections of the departmental self-study notebook. The updated text is in Arial Bold.

5. Outcomes Assessment

a. Assessment Plans

The Department established an outcomes assessment process in 1998-1999 for the B.A. degree program in philosophy. The process includes a threefold evaluation of the graduating senior student: (1) a one-hour oral comprehensive examination, graded Pass-Fail, (2) evaluation and letter grade for the BA thesis, and (3) a one-hour oral defense of the BA thesis. Each faculty member serving on the “departmental reading committee” completes a “composite score card” for the student in each of the three components (see Exhibit 3). The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to gauge the student’s ability to articulate a minimum of competent remarks on topics consistent with the required core of courses for the major as well as on topics consistent with his/her elected coursework. The purpose of the senior thesis is to develop in the student a research and writing competence that is indicative of reasonable promise for graduate study in the discipline. The purpose of the oral defense of the senior thesis is to afford the student an opportunity to present his/her independent research to the faculty and students in the program and to defend the position adduced.

a. Updated ASSESSMENT PLANS

The revised departmental Outcomes Assessment (OA) Plan is given in Part 3 of the Program Review materials. The plan includes:

- Senior portfolio of papers, three from philosophy courses and one from another discipline. Portfolios will be evaluated by an assessment committee of at least two department faculty, using a composite score card based on a standardized series of questions and evaluations.
- Incoming student questionnaire/checklist and orientation, for both majors and minors.
- Outgoing interview/survey, tracking/contact form.
- Established direct measures of student performance in philosophy coursework: exams, quizzes, essays, papers, presentations, written assignments, Q & A, class participation.
- The thesis (formerly the primary OA instrument) as an honors option, reduced to one semester, with an oral defense (one thesis advisor, with reading and examination by a minimum of three faculty).
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- Outgoing interview/survey, tracking/contact form.

- Established direct measures of student performance in philosophy coursework: exams, quizzes, essays, papers, presentations, written assignments, Q & A, class participation.

- The thesis (formerly the primary OA instrument) as an honors option, reduced to one semester, with an oral defense (one thesis advisor, with reading and examination by a minimum of three faculty).
b. Assessment Implementation

Since putting this process in place, the department faculty have evaluated five graduating seniors on the basis of the composite score card. These include two students who graduated in AY1998-1999 and three students who graduated in AY1999-2000. Bearing in mind that quantitative scores are difficult to apply and interpret, nevertheless the scores are suggestive.

One student in the group from AY98-99 received a score on the oral comprehensive examination ranging from a low of 17 to a high of 20 points out of 21 possible. Of the various areas examined this one student showed some “weakness” in addressing the question on ethical theory. The student’s score on the senior thesis ranged between 10 and 12 out of 12 points possible, with some question about the adequacy of reconstructed argument. In the case of the scoring on the oral defense, all faculty rated the student with 6 out of 6 points possible. The student’s average composite score was 36.

The second student in the group from AY98-99 received a score on the oral comprehensive examination ranging from a low of 8 to a high of 14 points out of 21 points possible. This student showed some “weakness” in the area of philosophy of science, classical philosophy, and ethical theory. The student’s score on the senior thesis ranged between a low of 6 and a high of 11 points out of 12 possible. Here the student demonstrated some weakness in his ability to provide critical commentary in the engagement of the texts he addressed. In the case of the scoring on the oral defense, the student demonstrated adequate skill in exposition but less immediate ability in articulation of structured argument. The student’s average composite score was 26.

Student “A” from the AY99-00 group received a score on the oral comprehensive examination ranging from a low of 16 to a high of 19 points out of 21 points possible. This student’s performance was in the “acceptable” range of answers, but there could have been some improvement in answers to questions concerning philosophical issues of scientific method involved in the contemporary natural and/or social sciences. The student’s score on the senior thesis ranged between a low of 9 and a high of 11 points out of 12 possible. Written performance was in the “acceptable” to “good” range of evaluation. In the case of the scoring on the oral defense, the student demonstrated “acceptable” to “good” performance in his ability to organize and deliver orally a concise summary of the main arguments of his senior thesis. He was also able to defend reasonably well his own arguments according to recognized criteria for logical cogency.

Student “B” from the AY 99-00 group received a score on the oral comprehensive examination ranging from a low of 12 to a high of 13 points out of 21 points possible. This student’s performance is to be measured in view of the fact that he did not commit to a philosophy major early but had instead intended on a major in music with a minor in philosophy. His performance is thus somewhat compromised by this late decision. This student’s performance was mostly in the “acceptable” rather than the “good” rating level, with noted deficiency in response to questions concerning ethical theory and questions concerning how Kant seeks to reconcile the ontological and epistemological tensions of rationalists and empiricists. This latter lack of information is explainable by the student’s enrollment in a course in modern philosophy at another institution, which course did not include a review of Kant’s philosophical position. This student’s score on the senior thesis ranged between a low of 8 and a high of 9 points out of 12 possible. This is in the “acceptable”
range of performance. There could have been some improvement here in the reconstruction of arguments exhibiting the scope and contour of the philosophical discussion on the topic(s) at issue and more explicit development of critical commentary, wherein the student manifests his own philosophical reasoning and informed position on the thesis topic at issue. In the case of the scoring on the oral defense, the student performed in the “acceptable” range.

Student “C” from the AY99-00 group offered a somewhat unusual situation. This student suffered from a severe writing handicap that included a lack of adequate formation in the basics of grammar and a lack of phonetic reading ability, both deficiencies diminishing his written and oral performance during his time in the program. The faculty nonetheless worked to accommodate this student in the same manner it would any student with a documented learning disability. As expected this student’s performance on the senior thesis was such as to receive mostly “poor” ratings from the faculty. The oral defense was somewhat better, having some “acceptable” scores, consistent with the student’s more developed speaking ability in contrast to his writing ability. The student’s performance on the oral comprehensive examination was mixed, between “poor” and “acceptable” on most questions.

The graduates from AY98-99 were two of the better students in the program in recent years. It became clear as a result of using this assessment process that the combination of senior thesis, oral defense, and oral comprehensive exam is simply too burdensome for the student as s/he works to complete the thesis yet make some effort to prepare for the oral exam. The faculty judged that the comprehensive examination was a redundant measure of the students’ retention of basic philosophical knowledge. In contrast, the senior thesis and the oral defense provided opportunity for the student to apply and articulate his/her basic philosophical knowledge and demonstrate reasonable competence one would expect of a graduating senior. Accordingly, the department faculty have decided to adjust the undergraduate program by eliminating the oral comprehensive examination and emphasizing the senior thesis and oral defense as the main tasks through which the student will demonstrate philosophical ability in exposition, reconstruction of argument, and critical commentary. A new B.A. degree assessment plan will be developed to reflect this change for the AY01-02.

b. Updated ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION

The results obtained with our previous assessment instrument—the senior research and writing sequence with oral defense—have proved generally unsatisfactory. The need for a total overhaul of the departmental OA plan became apparent when use of the OA instrument was suspended in March 2005, pending program review. According to the report of the chair at that time:

In recent years, while students in the major have completed this sequence, the faculty have noted what appears to be a steady decline in the quality of senior theses, despite faculty supervision of the research and writing process. While there are various reasons for this decline (as evidenced by standard measures such as skill in exposition of philosophical text, reconstruction of argument consistent with informal logical forms, and critical analysis according to logical criteria for cogency), the department faculty have been considering a revision to
the exit requirement—either eliminating the thesis requirement entirely or shifting the thesis to an honors option.

Participating faculty have subsequently moved for this latter option. The report continues:

Students do not adequately demonstrate retention of basic logical skills in oral defense even as they do not adequately exhibit such skill in the written theses. Generally speaking, all theses submitted for degree completion show continuing problems with elements of style and grammar, despite students having ongoing experience with written assignments in philosophy courses taken prior to the PHIL F499W and the core requirement in English composition.

Not all faculty agreed with this judgment categorically, but in general these have been problems for a majority of our students. Of the avg. 1-4 seniors per year, participating faculty have judged some students’ performances more favorably than this general characterization would indicate. Faculty have now expressed a different set of objectives, and articulated a new set of expected student learning outcomes as outlined above and given fully in Part 3, the department’s OA Plan.

c. Publishing Expected Outcomes

At present the Department has not published its student learning outcomes for the BA program in philosophy except by way of the composite score card distributed to each student during the senior year of study.

c. Updated PUBLISHING EXPECTED OUTCOMES

If the new OA Plan is approved and implemented, we will publish these expected outcomes in a brochure for majors, as part of our initial interview and orientation process (one aspect of the proposed OA Plan). If the new website is developed the expected learning outcomes could also be posted there.

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