Annual Assessment Report

Department: Philosophy
Academic Year: 2015-2016
Date of Submission: September 15th, 2016
Department Chair: Jim Taylor

I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations (Author: David Vander Laan)

The Philosophy Department met on Jan. 26, 2016 to discuss the PRC's response to its 2015 annual report. The report commended the department for reaching a "developed" level or higher on six out of eight criteria, at which the department was pleased. The report also pointed out some good first steps toward future assessment of GE learning outcomes (Reasoning Abstractly and Philosophical Reflections), and the department noted the PRC's suggestions in anticipation of the assessment of those areas (in 2018/19 and 2019/20, respectively). Taylor initiated communication with the PRC about how to improve the quality of evidence in the Philosophical Reflections data collection process.

In addition to Quality of Evidence, the areas in which the department could most use improvement, according to the report, were Quality of Measuring Instruments and (for one reviewer) Use of Evidence.

As to Quality of Measuring Instruments, the PRC expressed anticipation for a rubric for the department's "virtues" PLO. Nelson has since created a virtues rubric and used it to assess student work in PHI-104. The department met to discuss the rubric and the initial results at its Feb. 23 meeting. It observed that students met the benchmarks for both "enthusiasm for rational enquiry" and "awareness of limits of rational enquiry," though the sample of five enrolled students will eventually need to be supplemented.

As to Use of Evidence, the PRC was pleased with the department's proposed curricular changes. (These changes were prompted by the findings of the last six-year report about the size of the curriculum at comparison schools, as well as feedback the department has received from grad programs at which Westmont applicants were disadvantaged due to a relative dearth of units.) The department has continued to implement the changes, offering two new and one redesigned course in 2015/16. Vander Laan taught Ancient Philosophy in fall 2015. Taylor taught 19th and 20th Century Philosophy and Vander Laan taught the redesigned Critical Reasoning & Logic course in the spring. Those changes will continue this year as well. Vander Laan is currently teaching the new Medieval Philosophy and Formal Logic courses, and Taylor will teach the new Modern Philosophy course in the spring.

II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment (Author: Mark Nelson)

Program Learning Outcome	For 2015-16, we assessed our "**Virtues**" PLO: "Students will demonstrate both enthusiasm for rational inquiry and awareness of the limits of rational inquiry."
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Primary: Nelson Secondary: Taylor, Vander Laan
Direct Assessment Methods	The "Virtues" PLO was assessed in Mark Nelson's PHI-104-1 "Ethics" class, an upper-division philosophy elective with six students in it. We devised a new rubric for "Virtues" and used it to evaluate students' written work on the final exam. (See attached assignment and evaluation rubric.)
Indirect Assessment Methods	NA (We could not think of a method of indirect assessment that was likely to yield useful information – though we are open to suggestion.)
Major Findings	See attached report for full findings, but here is a brief summary: As we note below, this was a small class, so our findings are not statistically meaningful, but what numbers we have are positive: • The average score was 3.5 out of 4 on "Enthusiasm for Rational Enquiry" and 3.4 out of 4 on "Awareness of Limits of Rational Enquiry". • Also, 80% of students taking the test were judged "Good" or better on the both aspects of this PLO, so we have indeed achieved our benchmark. • We judge this to be a modestly positive result, however, this is the first year we have used this new rubric, so we are unable to make a comparative judgment with previous years. • Moreover, since the course numbers are so small – only six students were enrolled in the course and one of these was an auditor, who did not take the final exam – we know that these results are not statistically meaningful. To get meaningful results, we may have to aggregate results from other courses or with the same course over several years. • Assignment, sample rubric, student papers and grading sheets (with teacher's comments) have been uploaded and are available upon request from the Department of Philosophy.
Closing the	We noted in last year's report that we would need to create a new rubric for assessing the Virtue PLO, so that's what we did,

Loop Activities	and we used it to assess for that PLO.

Collaboration and Communication

- Mark Nelson created a first draft of the rubric based on a template devised earlier by David Vander Laan for the Skills PLO.
- He circulated his draft and its accompanying rationale and the corresponding essay exam assignment to the rest of the Philosophy Department for critical comments.
- The draft was discussed at a Departmental Meeting in Fall 2015, and some minor adjustments were later made based on those criticisms. In particular, we discussed how one might demonstrate both "enthusiasm for rational inquiry" and "awareness of the limits of rational inquiry."
- Mark Nelson then discussed the Virtue PLO and this rubric and its rationale with his Ethics class during the penultimate week of Fall 2015 before distributing the final essay exam designated for assessment.
- Mark Nelson then collated the results of this assessment exercise and sent it in electronic form to the rest of the Philosophy Department for discussion.

IV A. Other assessment-related projects (Author: Jim Taylor)

Project	According to our departmental multi-year assessment plan, the outcome we are scheduled to assess during the 2016-2017 academic year is our Knowledge PLO: "Students will demonstrate knowledge of important philosophical positions, concepts, arguments, and themes." The last time we engaged in an assessment of this PLO was during the 2009-2010 academic year. A summary of that assessment and our ensuing conversations about it can be found on our departmental website's "Program Review" page (click on the "Knowledge" link in the "Program Learning Outcomes" section). In brief, Mark Nelson assessed his Ethics students during the fall semester and David Vander Laan assessed his Senior Seminar students in the spring semester. Both used philosophical essays as their assessment instrument. The results in Mark's class of ten were mixed (partially because not all the students were philosophy majors or minors) and the results in David's class of five were encouraging: all the students demonstrated an excellent grasp of relevant important philosophical positions, concepts, arguments, and themes. In our conversations about these results, we came to the following conclusion:

	"Though we are pleased with our majors' performance relative to our Knowledge PLO by the time they take Philosophy Senior Seminar (a course required of all our majors) in their last spring semester before they graduate, we are discussing the possibility of formulating a broad and minimal list of things we would like our majors to know by the time they graduate. This list would be based on the core major courses all our majors need to take other than Senior Seminar (Philosophical Perspectives, Formal Logic, two history of philosophy courses). Our goal will be for our majors to graduate with an acceptable amount of knowledge of enough of the items on this list (rather than complete knowledge of each item)." One of our assessment goals this year will be to continue talking about a list of this sort in preparation for our assessment of our majors' learning relative to this PLO in the spring semester. That assessment will take place in our Philosophy Senior Seminar class, and will once again be accomplished by means of a philosophical essay.
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Mark is the professor assigned to teach Senior Seminar next spring, so he will administer and evaluate the assessment. But David and Jim will play a secondary role by discussing the essay assignment with Mark in advance, reviewing the rubric he plans to use in evaluating the essays, and reading the essays after he has evaluated them to compare our individual assessments of them with his.
Major Findings	We hope to find that our graduating seniors will demonstrate an excellent grasp of relevant important philosophical positions, concepts, arguments, and themes. We also plan to combine the data we gather with the data we collected during the earlier assessment of this PLO, since the number of students we are able to assess at any given time is relatively low due to the relatively low number of philosophy majors we have.
Action	If our assessment of our Knowledge PLO shows that our majors do not have an excellent grasp of each of the sorts of philosophical knowledge we have identified as important, we will talk about the possibility of taking action to correct that deficiency by revising the relevant courses in our curriculum in ways that seem best to us given the results of our assessment.
Collaboration and Communication We have begun to discuss this assessment project in a recent department meeting. At our next meeting we will talk about the list of topics and at another meeting following that one we will talk about Mark's plans to assess his Senior Seminar students by looking at this assignment and rubric in light of our list. Finally, we will plan to discuss our individual evaluations of his students' essays submitted for this assignment at a meeting later in the spring semester.	

IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects

Project	Add the Oral Communications ILOs to our Senior Seminar class
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Since the three of us take turns teaching Senior Seminar, all of us will be involved in this process (though Mark will be teaching it next semester, so he will be the first to implement these ILOs in the class).
Major Findings	N/A
Action	N/A

Collaboration and Communication

At this point we have some key questions about this project: (1) How will we implement these ILOs into a course that is already dedicated to the "Writing-Intensive Course Within the Major" GE requirement, and (2) Since we do not have training in oral communication, but as professional philosophers focus rather on *written* communication, how will we be equipped to adequately assess our students relative to the second of the three ILOs in this area (the second ILO concerns *oral delivery* specifics)?

VI. Appendices

A. Background, Rubric, Results, Commentary, and Assignment
B. Sample essay