

Assessment Plan AY 2011-2012
Department of Philosophy
John Jay College CUNY

I. Mission Statement

The study of philosophy involves a critical examination of our most fundamental beliefs about truth and reality, right and wrong. The Department is dedicated to giving students the expertise and confidence not only to respond to all manner of arguments, but to generate their own questions and research agendas. As a field of study, philosophy advances human communication and, through it, a sensitivity to the diverse factors affecting attitudes and beliefs about justice and judgment. Thus, philosophical training will prepare students for study in a variety of fields including law and public service. While philosophy is a text- and idea-based discipline, its origin and aims are intimately tied to how we live together as human beings. One goal of philosophy pedagogy is to help philosophy students read texts carefully and critically, and be unafraid to point out errors in reasoning, advance different possible conclusions, and suggest new aspirations—for study, policy, and life.

II. Learning Outcomes

1. Majors and minors will be able to explain a section from a philosophical text, a philosophical theory, a philosophical issue, or a philosophical argument.
2. Majors and minors will be able to identify arguments and distinguish premises and conclusions.
3. Majors and minors will be able to formulate an argument in support of or in opposition to a claim.
4. Majors will be able to demonstrate familiarity with a basic problem or a major theory in a main area of philosophical inquiry.
5. Majors will be able to demonstrate familiarity with a primary claim or critical response to a primary claim in the history of western philosophy.

III. Assessment Philosophy

The department's view of the role of assessment in student learning begins with the following tenet: *first, do no harm*. The American Philosophical Association Statement on Outcomes Assessment [OA] (2008)¹ states in pertinent part:

Certainly OA can be used in a careless and damaging fashion, for instance, where only one kind of measurement is used or where the outcomes are entirely along the cognitive dimension while ignoring the affective and social dimensions. OA must not be treated as an end in itself, but rather as one (albeit important) means for educational improvement. Educational values should guide not only what instructors choose to assess but also how they do so, and those values can be made clear to students through the methods of OA (p. 9).

While it is difficult to fashion a straightforward, adequate instrument of assessment for philosophy courses, we recognize the need for assessment and we have developed an approach we believe will be effective. One reason for the difficulty of assessing philosophy courses is that student learning in philosophy does not occur in a predictable, measurable manner susceptible to fine-grained control by instructors. Philosophical understanding often 'dawns' on students in unpredictable ways, and does not occur according to a schedule set by a course's syllabus or the calendar of papers and examinations. Nevertheless, it is possible to ascertain whether students have in fact acquired certain skills and/or some philosophical understanding in a given course. All students should be able to attain some comprehension of the character, genuineness, and significance of philosophical issues even if students are more focused on work in other disciplines. In assessing learning-outcomes our chief concern is that students attain an informed appreciation of the relevance and importance of the distinctively philosophical aspects of many of the fundamental topics relevant to criminal justice. Moreover, the study of philosophy should help students develop skills and habits that will well serve them in whatever occupations they pursue and in any further studies they undertake. These are skills and habits of critical reading comprehension, clarity of articulation, disambiguation of concepts, and intellectually responsible reasoning.

IV. Five-Year Cycle of Assessment

Assessment Methods

Direct Assessment: Department syllabi will include the objectives assessed in a given period. The instructor for each course will determine which assignment from those listed in the syllabus will be used to assess student achievement of that objective. Each instructor will also write a rubric, or list of three criteria, to use in sorting student work into three categories: Not Good Enough, Good Enough, Better Than Good Enough. Each instructor will sort student work into the three categories using the rubric, count up the

¹ http://www.apaonline.org/APAOnline/About_The_APA/Statements/Issues/Outcomes_Assessment.aspx

number of items in each category, and fill out a tally sheet (see Appendix A: Generic Tally Sheet, and Appendix B: Sample Tally Sheet with sample rubric). Finally, instructors will select from each of the three categories a single representative sample and make an anonymous photocopy of it. Instructors will deliver 2 copies of the tally sheet and of the samples of student work to the department co-chair coordinating assessment.

Indirect Assessment: The department will design surveys for majors and minors enrolled in a given semester. The department will review faculty and student use of support services (writing center, CELS, other tutoring services). The department will review the final grades for majors and minors enrolled in a given semester. When the department has graduated enough majors to generate data, it will formulate a survey of alumni majors (TBA).

AY 2011-12

Direct assessment of two courses in Fall 2011 (PHI 231 and PHI 310), and a survey of minors enrolled in courses in Spring 2012. Note: since the major arrived as a program mid-semester Fall 2011, this year's direct assessment targets only the minor using outcomes passed by the department for those courses in Spring 2010 (henceforward obsolete), and the indirect assessment will also confine itself to minors, since students were only able to declare the major in late Fall 2011.

AY 2012-13

Direct assessment of two courses TBA using objective 1. Students will be able to explain a section from a philosophical text, a philosophical theory, a philosophical issue, or a philosophical argument. Indirect assessment via survey of faculty and student use of support services (writing center, CELS, other tutoring).

AY 2013-14

Direct assessment of two courses TBA using objective 2: Students will be able to identify arguments and distinguish premises and conclusions. Indirect assessment via a survey of majors enrolled in courses in fall and spring semesters.

AY 2014-15

Direct assessment of two courses TBA using objective 3. Students will be able to formulate an argument in support of or in opposition to a claim. Indirect assessment via a review of grades earned by majors enrolled in all courses satisfying major requirements in one semester.

AY 2015-16

Direct assessment of two courses TBA using objective 4. Students will be able to demonstrate familiarity with a basic problem or a major theory in a main area of philosophical inquiry. Indirect assessment via survey of alumni philosophy majors and minors.

Appendix A: Generic Tally Sheet

Outcomes Assessment Tally Sheet

Instructor Name:

Department: Philosophy

Email:

Course Name, Number and Term:

Objective:

Assignment:

Tally Assessment Category Rubric

Better than good enough

Good enough

Not good enough

Appendix B: Completed Tally Sheet, with Sample Rubric (*for illustration ONLY*)

Outcomes Assessment Tally Sheet

Instructor Name: Matthew Moore (matthewm@brooklyn.cuny.edu)

Department: Philosophy

Course Name, Number and Term: Ethics of Personal Relations, Philosophy 6.5 (Spr 06)

Objective: The ability to develop ideas by using supportive evidence appropriate to the discipline

Assignment: A response paper on two essays about the morality of marriage

<u>Tally</u>	<u>Assessment Category</u>	<u>Rubric</u>
	Better than good enough	A strong and sharply targeted objection to the student's own view, from the opposing author, is clearly and thoroughly stated
	Good enough	An objection to the student's view, using ideas from the opposing author, is stated in a substantial paragraph
	Not good enough	The objection is stated briefly if at all, or is not relevant or based on ideas from the opposing author