John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Department of Philosophy
Assessment Report, August 15, 2015
Academic Year 2014-2015

The 2014-15 academic year is the third year in a full assessment cycle for the department, and the first full year in a full assessment cycle for the philosophy major. The major formally inaugurated in November 2011 and one student graduated who was able to convert appropriate courses from HJS to allow her to construct a major in philosophy. May 2012 saw seven students graduate as philosophy majors, and in May 2013 and May 2014 the department again graduated majors. There are at present (August 2015) 98 Majors and 72 Minors. The department has assessed the major through direct assessment of two courses in Spring 2015: Phi 231(The Big Questions) a foundational course for the major and Phi 403 (Senior Seminar on Metaphysics and Epistemology), a capstone course for the major.

I. Assessment Results for Academic Year 2014-2015

Program assessment for the major focused on two objectives: *Students will be able to identify arguments and distinguish premises and conclusions,* and *Students will be able to formulate an argument in support of or in opposition to a claim,* which was assessed in Fall 2011 in PHI 310 (Law and Ethics).

Results by objective:

Objective: *Students will be able to **formulate an argument** in support of or in opposition to a claim.*

	NGE[1]	GE	BGE
(S) Phi 403	4	10	5

Objective: *Students will be able to **identify arguments** and distinguish premises and conclusions*

	NGE[2]	GE	BGE
(S) PHI 231	4	6	2

All results:

NGE: 8 (26%) GE: 16 (51%) BGE: 7 (23%)

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[1] NGE=Not Good Enough; GE=Good Enough; BGE=Better Than Good Enough.

Conclusions: In this, our first full year of direct assessment of the philosophy major, two courses, were analyzed; one which serves as a prerequisite for other courses in the major and the other - a senior seminar, which represents a culmination of the students' studies in the major. As one might expect, the students taking their first philosophy course had more difficulty mastering the identification of arguments and the distinction of premises and conclusions than the more advanced students did formulating an argument in support of or in opposition to a claim. The 400 level students performed at a significantly higher level than the 200 level students with respect to the different objectives.

N.B.: Data for this year does not include the level of student enrolled in each course, nor the major or minor declarations for the student population under assessment.

II. Assessment in Program Planning: Academic Year 2015-2016

Members of the full-time faculty are slowly being integrated into the department's assessment efforts. We expect this process to accelerate in the coming year, as the Philosophy Major continues to develop and we turn to program assessment directed at both the major and the minor. We recognize the need to have a more comprehensive assessment instrument, the need to generate more information regarding student-learning and the trajectory of student-learning, and the need to formulate an instrument that can be applied effectively in the sense that it can guide specific approaches intended to improve student learning. There are several notions about students' preparation for college-level work, their performance, and the most prevalent students weaknesses but we need to be able to confirm or disconfirm those notions on the basis of careful examination of student performance.

Also, it would be illuminating to see what differences, if any, there are in student-learning between students who take most of their courses from full-time members of the faculty versus those who take most of their courses from adjunct instructors. Here, too, there are some anecdotal notions about adjuncts being easier graders and adjuncts giving less challenging graded exercises (exams, papers, presentations, etc.). We need to discover what we can about what is actually the case. The department takes these matters seriously but we have been somewhat remiss with respect to going ahead and doing the required work. Also, even something as straightforward as a one-hundred-question short-answer exercise, given to students at the end of their third philosophy course, and given to students at the end of their sixth philosophy course (especially if we are able to track the same students) might be telling. It would not reveal much about how effectively students write or about how well able they are to articulate or formulate philosophical arguments or the intellectual motivations for certain positions, and so forth; but it might be a helpful measure of whether they have a basically accurate understanding of such things. We have not formally discussed these possibilities but they will be raised early in the '15-'16 academic year and we will make a sustained effort to make progress in developing our approach to assessment.

Along with extension of the assessment process to include both participation and improved supervision of our adjunct faculty, the department recognizes that it is currently deficient in several aspects of its assessment of its programs. In the coming year the department will focus on the following goals for assessment

1st, adding indirect assessment of both the major and the minor.

2nd, increasing the detail of our assessment planning to include a calendar and particular assignments for direct assessment throughout the year.

3rd, beginning to 'close the loop' using the above results to develop specific responses by way of program and course improvement in response to the data.

4th, acquiring data to enable the department to identify majors and minors in particular courses subject to direct assessment and all students subject to indirect assessment.

The department will also develop a set of criteria for selecting courses for direct assessment in a given year, and begin to monitor the quality and usability of data it collects, with an eye to improving the quality of results in future cycles.

Appendix 1

Philosophy Department Mission

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.

Appendix 2
Rubrics for Program Assessment

Objective: *Students will be able to formulate an argument in support of or in opposition to a claim.*

Better Than Good Enough: Student delivers a comprehensive analysis of two views and an extended argument to support one of the two views.

Good Enough: Student delivers some analysis of two views and a simple argument to support one of the two views.

Not Good Enough: Student summarizes the views under discussion without analysis or argument for one of the two views.

Objective: *Students will be able to identify arguments and distinguish premises and conclusions.*

>   200 level rubrics:

Better Than Good Enough: Student identifies most or all of the premises and the conclusion of a short, simple argument.

Good Enough: Student identifies a short, simple argument, including at least one premise and the conclusion.

Not Good Enough: Student summarizes the text(s) without identifying a short, simple argument, premises, or conclusion.

>   400 level rubrics:

Better Than Good Enough: Student identifies most or all of the premises and the conclusion of an extended, complex argument.

Good Enough: Student identifies an extended, complex argument, including at least one premise and the conclusion.

Not Good Enough: Student summarizes the text(s) without identifying an extended, complex argument, premises, or conclusion.

Appendix 3
Department Learning Objectives[2]

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.

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[2] Please note the subset of objectives indicated for minors.

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.

Our current approach to assessment lacks adequate breadth, even though the department's learning objectives reflect our awareness of what sort of breadth assessment should aspire to evaluate. There is much more to philosophy than recognizing and tracking arguments—though that is absolutely crucial and is integral to the discipline. The making of distinctions, the grasp of their implications and significance, the appreciation of what motivates different philosophical issues and approaches to them, the ways in which certain fundamental issues recur in multiple philosophical contexts (e.g. in ethics, philosophy of science, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of law, etc.) and the relations between philosophical arguments and the special sciences and ordinary experience—all of those are important aspects of the study of philosophy. Moreover, even though arguments are crucially important, philosophical arguments are often embedded in complex conceptions including insights, illustrations, replies to objections, and so forth. Students need to develop abilities to recognize those various elements of philosophical thought. Studying basic argument forms, which is something one does in an introductory course in Logic is quite helpful but philosophical arguments do not typically occur in such straightforward forms, and there is more to thought than tracing implications.

One type of understanding it might be interesting to try to assess has to do with what follows from a certain philosophical claim and what it presupposes—i.e., try to assess how well students understand the 'vertical' connections between ideas and claims, what assumptions they rest on and what follows from them.

The comprehension of content and substantive ideas is vitally important, and the ability to recognize and follow reasoning, often concerning quite abstract matters, is vitally important. We need to work on developing assessment instruments that will be somewhat more revealing in regard to both comprehension and reasoning. That will be one of our departmental priorities in the current academic year. One way we might (at least initially) approach this is to see if we can fashion instruments to assess:

a. Students' grasp of substantive philosophical claims and ideas [content]
b. Students' grasp of structures of philosophical reasoning [the 'vertical' structure of philosophical ideas]
c. How their grasp of (a) and (b) improves (or not) as they take more courses
d. Students' grasp of the relation between philosophy and other types of inquiry (natural scientific, social scientific, etc.) and various forms of experience (moral, aesthetic, etc.). [What can they tell us about what they are studying when they study philosophy? This might be a way of finding out what sorts of intellectual abilities and what kind of

understanding they think they are acquiring. Seeing what they say after two courses and then what they say after five courses might be helpfully revealing.]

Following through, whether we proceed in the way sketched out here or in some other way, will require an effort on the part of more than just one person or a couple of people. This needs to be an effort of the department—in the design phase, in the execution phase, and in the "where do we go from here" phase.

Appendix 4: Tally Sheets for Courses Assessed AY 2014-15

Academic Assessment Tally Sheet

Instructor Name: Amie Macdonald (amacdonald@jjay.cuny.edu)

Department: Philosophy   Phone Number: 212-237-8345

Course Name, Number and Term: PHI 231 The Big Questions, Spring 2014

Objective: Identify arguments and distinguish premises and conclusions.

Assignment: Midterm exam essay

Tally	_Assessment Category_	_Rubric_
2	Better than good enough	Student identifies most or all of the premises and the conclusion of a short, simple argument.
6	Good enough	Student identifies a short, simple argument, including at least one premise and the conclusion.
4	Not good enough	Student summarizes the text(s) without identifying a short, simple argument, premises, or conclusion.

Academic Assessment Tally Sheet

Instructor Name: James DiGiovanna (jdigiovanna@jjay.cuny.edu)

Department: Philosophy   Phone Number: 212-237-8336

Course Name, Number and Term: Senior Seminar on Metaphysics and Epistemology, Phi 403

Objective: Formulate an argument in support of or in opposition to a claim.

Assignment: Midterm exam essay

Tally	*Assessment Category*	*Rubric*
5	Better than good enough	Student delivers a comprehensive analysis of two views and an extended argument to support one of the two views.
10	Good enough	Student delivers some analysis of two views and a simple argument to support one of the two views.
4	Not good enough	Student summarizes the views under discussion without analysis or argument for one of the two views.