Mission
The Philosophy Department offers the Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, rigorous and up-to-date philosophy courses in General Education as well as for elective credit, a Minor, and service courses for other disciplines, particularly in applied and professional ethics. Finally, the Department functions as a center for philosophy, in particular applied and professional ethics, within the Sacramento region.

Philosophy is less content- and method-specific than other academic disciplines. The basic aim of education in Philosophy should not be to impart information nor to teach a particular technique, but to help students understand various kinds of deeply difficult intellectual problems, to interpret texts deliberating these problems, to analyze and criticize arguments, and to express themselves in ways that clarify and carry forward our thinking about the problems.

Students majoring in philosophy should develop knowledge of the history of philosophy and the current state of the discipline, a grasp of representative philosophical questions and of ways to answer those questions. But more importantly, philosophy majors should be able to apply methods and techniques used in philosophy to intellectual problems generally. Thus a philosophy major should develop a critical mind, analytical and interpretative abilities, and a capacity for the imaginative application of abstract formulations to concrete situations.

These objectives may be achieved in different ways and through different kinds of methods and techniques: dialectical debate, logical proof, critical interpretation, historical comparison, counterfactual reasoning. Ideally these will be combined, though one approach or another may prevail in a given course.

For students taking philosophy as part of the GE program (the majority of students enrolling in philosophy courses at Sacramento State) the specific goals of the department are: to offer an introductory deliberation of philosophical questions, an acquaintance with some influential answers to those questions through the study of philosophers and their work; to help the students develop the analytical, logical, critical, and verbal skills essential to the study not only of philosophy, but of problems and issues outside philosophy.

Student Learning Objectives
(Adapted from “Grid of Courses by Specific Outcomes”)
1. Ability to recognize the precise question at issue, and to distinguish it from other, similar issues.
2. Clear argumentative writing
3. Critical analysis and appraisal
4. Grasp of fine distinctions
5. Improved skill in formal logic and in reasoning generally

**Outcomes**
(The following outcomes are keyed to the “Student Learning Objectives” above.)
Students should be able to demonstrate their capacity to:
1. State the precise issue in writing.
2. Produce relevant arguments for (or against) one side of the precise issue in writing.
3. State unexpressed premises and assumptions explicitly; evaluate premises and assumptions.
4. Distinguish correctly among closely-resembling claims.
5. Determine whether an argument is valid – and if not why not.

**Measurement**
A. **Major, Minor, Electives, and General Education:** Assessment Tests containing items to demonstrate student achievement of the outcomes.
   (See the endnotes under “Outcomes” for samples from the Assessment Tests.)

B. **Major, Minor, and Electives:** Course Materials Review
   Review is conducted by the Curriculum Committee every third semester. Syllabi, reading materials, exams, etc., for each section are reviewed against “Assessment Plan” for the course. The most recent review was completed Spring 2008.

C. **Major:** Senior Paper Submission Review
   Every senior major is required to submit a writing sample for review by the Assessment Committee.

**Results**
A. **Assessment Tests**
   Compliance in administering assessment tests dropped sharply in Spring 2008. The chair of the Assessment Committee attributes this to the “decline in part-time faculty for Fall 2008, as well as increased workload.”

   Also noted were declines in certain course scores:
   PHIL 004: from “7.7 (in 2005-2006, the last year of the original 004 test) to 7.1 this year (the second year of the revised test).

B. **Course Materials Review**
   The Curriculum Committee reports that compliance with Learning Objectives has “significantly improved, but many syllabi have problems.” The most frequent problems involved:
   - Indication of how the section meets the G.E. criteria for the course. “It was occasionally possible for the Committee to infer” that the course was meeting the objectives.
- Indication of whether the courses meet the G. E. and departmental writing requirements and Guidelines.
- Proper description of student outcome goals. Too often the ‘goals’ stated are merely topics rather than assessable outcomes.

C. Senior Paper Submission Review

The Assessment Committee noted a decline in compliance this year. The review of Fall 07/Spring 08 senior essays noted no significant changes in quality from last year, as measured against the “Writing Guidelines for philosophy Papers”.

Response

A. Assessment Tests

The assessment tests have been useful in fostering a ‘culture of assessment’. However, after six years of experience with their administration a dilemma has arisen. While we are now in a position to revise both the content of the tests and the means of their administration, any changes will destroy the evidential value of diachronic comparisons. We will be less able to determine if we have gone forward or backward over time.

B. Course Materials Review

Review of syllabi and assignments is essential to maintaining compliance with requirements, as well as providing new faculty guidance in devising adequate course materials.

This is the third round of review, and the improvements from the first review have been dramatic.

C. Senior Paper Submission Review

Senior essay submissions have been useful. Most students submit an essay written for class, thus ensuring that it is representative of their best graded work. Improvements in student writing competence derived from publication of the “Writing Guidelines” are visible as a result.

Since submission of an essay is a graduation requirement, some effort should be made to improve compliance. Since the department has a graduation check-off list, and each student must see an advisor, the primary tool for ensuring compliance must be insistence on it by faculty advisors.

Looking Ahead

The Department intends to assess the same student learning objectives next year.

In the coming few years the Department must resolve the dilemma of the assessment tests and connect the results of the assessment to changes in curriculum delivery.
Sample Question (Taken from Philosophy 4 Assessment Test)
Consider this dialogue:
Mitch: I don’t think you should buy a used car. Buy a new one because they come with a warranty.
Melissa: But the only new one I can afford is a Griffin, and they’re unsafe and unreliable according to Autoweek.
Mitch: Autoweek is biased toward luxury vehicles. You should check Consumer Reports.
Melissa: Actually, I think I should consult with my uncle Jason. He bought a Griffin last year.
What is the precise issue?
   a. Whether Melissa should buy a Griffin.
   b. Whether Melissa should buy a new car or a used car.
   c. What sources Melissa should consult in deciding what kind of car to buy.
   d. Whether it is a good idea to buy a car with a warranty.

Sample Question
Which of the following is not an assumption or unexpressed in the dialogue?
   a. Used cars don’t come with warranties.
   b. All things being equal, it is preferable to have a warranty on a car.
   c. Used Griffins aren’t available.
   d. A personal acquaintance is a more reliable source of information than a consumer magazine.
   e. Melissa needs a car.

Sample Question
“What is the logical relation between Mereological Essentialism and Joseph Butler’s ‘strict and philosophical’ sense of ‘same’?”
   a. They are contraries.
   b. They are contradictories.
   c. Mereological Essentialism is a sufficient condition for Butlerian strict identity.
   d. Mereological Essentialism is a necessary condition for Butlerian strict identity.
   e. Mereological Essentialism and Butlerian strict identity are both entailed by the logical properties of identity.

Sample Question
Consider this argument:
1. Everything that exists fails to exist at some time.
2. If everything fails to exist at some time, then there is a time at which nothing exists.
3. If there is a time at which nothing exists, then nothing exists now.
4. But (3) is absurd.
   Therefore,
5. It is not the case that everything fails to exist at some time.
   Therefore,
6. There must be something that exists throughout all time, that is, eternally.

A. Is this argument valid? If so, what is its logical form? If not, what logical error does it commit?
B. Is premise (2) true or false?
C. Are conclusions (5) and (6) logically equivalent?