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 pursuing a major 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 has been 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.
   As indicated below, this year the department changed from a review to a checklist.

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
   In Spring 2008 compliance in administering assessment tests dropped sharply. The chair of the Assessment Committee attributed this to the decline in part-time faculty, as well as increased workload for everyone.
   This year the Assessment Chair sent out reminders to the faculty, and compliance improved.
   There were no significant differences in student performance on the assessments from last year, or indeed from previous years.

B. Course Materials Review
   This element of the departmental assessment policy has been as successful as policy is ever likely to be in changing behavior. Faculty compliance with departmental syllabus requirements has become so universal and ‘internalized’ that omissions are minor and usually inadvertent.
For this reason the department voted this year to monitor syllabi for compliance only every three years. Faculty are still obliged to submit a checklist (attached) certifying compliance. This is the fourth round of review, and as indicated in previous reports the improvements from the first review have been dramatic.

C. **Senior Paper Submission Review**
   The Assessment Committee noted a decline in compliance last year. The department took some steps to improve it, as noted below.

**Response**

A. **Assessment Tests**
   Compliance increased over last year’s lapses because of vigorous reminders and encouragement by the Assessment Committee chair.

B. **Course Materials Review**
   This element of the departmental assessment policy has been as successful as a policy is ever likely to be. Compliance with departmental syllabus requirements has become so universal and ‘internalized’ that omissions are minor and usually inadvertent. For this reason the department voted this year to sample syllabi for compliance only every five years. Faculty are still obliged to submit a checklist (attached) for each course certifying compliance. This is the fourth round of review, and as indicated in previous reports the improvements from the first review have been dramatic.

C. **Senior Paper Submission Review**
   Student compliance with the senior essay submission requirement dropped last year. As a result, the department produced fliers reminding students of the requirement. Compliance improved as a result, though it remains less than perfect. The twice-annual meetings of the majors overseen by the Advisement chair will also be a useful reminder. The review of Fall 08/Spring 09 senior essays submitted were judged to be improved from last year, especially in argumentative structure. Improvements in student writing competence derived from publication of the “Writing Guidelines” continue to be manifest.

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

However, it will also be conducting an assessment of our assessment policy itself in light of recommendations from the Program Review team, as well as from the external reviewer.

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i  Sample Question (Taken from Philosophy 2 Assessment Test)
Consider this dialogue:
Dr. Martin Luther King claimed that racism was objectively wrong. He thought that racism would be wrong even if no society recognized that it was wrong. In saying this, King disagreed with the norms of his society. He appealed to absolute truth about right and wrong, one that wasn’t dependent on human thinking or feeling. This makes him a(n):

- subjectivist
- cultural relativist
- objectivist
- revolutionary
- onanist

ii Sample Question (Taken from Philosophy 6 Assessment Test)
On the issue of free will, what assumption do both ‘hard determinists’ and ‘libertarians’ make:

- that free will requires actions to be caused by the agent’s desires and motive
- that quantum theory shows that determinism is false
- that free will requires that the agent have been able to act otherwise than he did
- that democracy is necessary for free will
- e.

iii Sample Question
“What is the logical relation between Mereological Essentialism and Joseph Butler's ‘strict and philosophical’ sense of ‘same’?”

- They are contraries.
- They are contradictories.
- Mereological Essentialism is a sufficient condition for Butlerian strict identity.
- Mereological Essentialism is a necessary condition for Butlerian strict identity.
- Mereological Essentialism and Butlerian strict identity are both entailed by the logical properties of identity.

iv 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?