Assessment Report 2009-2010
Department of Philosophy
College of Arts & Letters

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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\(^i\).
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\(^ii\).
4. Distinguish correctly among closely-resembling claims\(^iii\).
5. Determine whether an argument is valid – and if not why not\(^iv\).

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, the department changed from an review to a checklist certification by the instructor, with a full review only every three years.

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

2009-2010 Results
A. Assessment Tests
At the first faculty meeting of the Fall Semester (September 2, 2009) the Department created an Ad Hoc Committee “to review and revise the Assessment Policy and Procedures.”
In light of continued poor compliance in administering the Assessment Tests during the Fall semester, and creation of the Ad Hoc Committee, the Department moved at its last faculty meeting of the semester (December 2, 2009) to “suspend the quantitative assessment for PHIL 002, 004, and 006 for the Spring semester.”

B. Course Materials Review
Last year the Department changed the procedure for implementing this policy from a review by the Curriculum Committee to a certification by the faculty member that, for every course,
– the program goals
– GE goals (if any)

were met, and that the outcomes, including GE outcomes, were being measured.

The certification takes the form of a checklist which must be submitted for each course. The checklists revealed that the program goals, as well as the department’s syllabus requirements, have become universal, and that omissions are minor and usually inadvertent.

C. **Senior Paper Submission Review**

Compliance with this senior requirement was acceptable this year, as a result of prompting by the faculty. However, the improvement in compliance revealed at least one senior paper failing the minimum standards for acceptability. The bulk of the senior papers were at least acceptable, revealing that the outcomes as measured by papers showed that the goals were being met.

Improvements in student writing competence derived from publication of the “Writing Guidelines” continue to be manifest.

**For 2010-2011**

The Ad Hoc Committee established in September will be conducting a thoroughgoing review of its Assessment Policy and procedures. The results of that review will be a set of recommendations for revising and streamlining. We anticipate that any changes will be in place for 2011-2012.

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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):

a. subjectivist  
b. cultural relativist  
c. objectivist  
d. revolutionary  
e. 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:

a. that free will requires actions to be caused by the agent’s desires and motive  
b. that quantum theory shows that determinism is false  
c. that free will requires that the agent have been able to act otherwise than he did
d. 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'?”
   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.

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?