Assessment of Student Learning Plan: Philosophy Department

Review of 2012-13 Academic Year

University of Southern Maine

A. College, Department or Program, Date

College	CAHS
Department or Program	PHILOSOPHY
Date	MAY 31, 2013

B. Department or Program Chair: Julien Murphy
(person responsible for completing this form)

C. Degree or other Program: BA

D. Assessment of Student Learning

1: Has your department identified any Student Learning Outcomes? (What are students able to do by the end of your program?)

> a. *List the most important student learning outcomes (3-5) that have been agreed upon in your department. Then, identify which student learning outcome (1-2) was assessed this past year. See Appendix A for definitions and examples.*
> The Philosophy Department completed a 9 year review (Self-Study) for NEAC. Below is the information on our assessments and learning outcomes:

Student Learning Outcomes for the Philosophy Major (knowledge, skills, dispositions)

Our major goal is to encourage students to gain knowledge of the history of philosophy, its major historical moments, and its recent movements, while engaging critically and productively with this past.

Our goal for the entry-level courses (100-level and EYE) is to interest students in the discipline of philosophy. The challenge is always to introduce students to a discipline that they typically have not encountered in K-12 education. This requires the teaching of philosophical reading, close textual analysis, arguments, rhetorical and strategies. Skill-based objectives are: to improve students' reading, writing, and critical thinking skills for engaged citizenship.

Our goals for the 200-level courses are: critical analysis tethered to historical, social and economic contexts, more precision and rigor in philosophical thought, and learning how to formulate one's own question or problem in a 200-level class. The 200-level curriculum has three parts: 1) traditional branches of philosophy (epistemology, philosophy of mind, ethical theory, metaphysics, logic), 2) applied philosophy: death and dying, bioethics, media ethics, environmental ethics, genetics and society, philosophy and social media, and 3) meta-analysis of a discipline: philosophy of science, philosophy of law, political philosophy. These courses achieve more depth in subfields and disciplines than the 100-level courses by inspecting the presuppositions of theory and practice. These deep and focused inquiries contribute both to the disciplines with which they engage and to philosophy as a whole.

Objectives for the 300-level include: teaching historical precision about a philosophical epoch, challenging students to contextualize philosophy in a historical narrative in order to see the importance of historical perspective and understand that all outlooks are limited by a historical moment, and to engage dynamically with the past.

Objectives for the 400-level include: demonstrating the role of research, developing seminar skills that enable student-led discussion of a text, presentation of their own research, and independent scholarly self-directed study.

The Philosophy Major curriculum emphasizes the following skills:

a) General Problem-Solving Skills. The study of philosophy enhances, in a way no other activity does, students' general problem-solving capacities. It requires students to analyze concepts, definitions, presuppositions, arguments and problems. It enables students both to distinguish fine differences among views and to discover common ground between opposing positions. Finally, it helps them to synthesize a variety of views or perspectives into a unified whole.

b) Communication Skills. Philosophy also contributes uniquely to the development of expressive and communicative powers. It provides some basic tools of self-expression (for instance, skills in presenting ideas through well constructed, systematic arguments) that other fields either do not use, or use less extensively. It encourages students to express clearly what is distinctive in their views, enhances their ability to understand and explain difficult material, and helps them to eliminate ambiguities and vagueness from their writing and speech.

c) Writing Skills. Writing is an important part of philosophy courses. We teach students interpretive writing through examination of challenging texts, comparative writing through emphasis on the construction of alternative positions, argumentative writing through developing students' ability to establish their own views, and descriptive writing through detailed portrayal of concrete examples as the anchors to which generalizations must be tied. Both structure and technique, then, are emphasized in philosophical writing. Originality is also encouraged, and students are encouraged to use their imagination to develop their own ideas.

d) Synthesis Skills. We teach students multiple ways of understanding the relationship of philosophy to other disciplines. Many fundamental questions about a discipline, such as the nature of its concepts and its relations to other disciplines, do not belong to that discipline and are not usually pursued in it, but rather are philosophical in nature. Many 200-level Philosophy courses (for example, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Law, Philosophy of Art, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophical Psychology) explore important conceptual and normative features of disciplines, and are valuable courses for students with interdisciplinary interests. Several 300-level History of Philosophy courses also examine the historical roots and development of various fields of study.

e) Research Skills. Students are trained in specific skills using library information retrieval systems and scholarly digital search engines. This contributes to their capacity to organize ideas and issues, to deal with questions of value, and to extract what is essential from masses of information.

Dispositions: The philosophy curriculum develops students as critical thinkers, actively engaged in civic life. It provides them with a mental map that starts them on their journey and helps them find their path as lifelong learners.

Assessment Plan for Student Learning Outcomes

Course goals and learning outcomes are stated on each syllabus. Achievement of these goals and outcomes is measured in a variety of different ways, e.g., mid-term and final exams, term papers, quizzes, short assignments, role playing, oral presentations, prompts given out at the beginning and end of semesters. All professors in our department stress the use of multiple graded essay assignments as a key means of evaluating student progress.

Students report that courses have been successful in teaching them how to think clearly and distinctly in handling difficult matter, as well as in learning to write succinct essays on difficult subjects.

Courses are reviewed for part-timers by a departmental review subcommittee at the end of each academic year. Courses for full-time faculty are reviewed by a peer committee during post-tenure reviews every four years. More frequent reviews are scheduled if a teaching problem is identified by students or faculty.

The department periodically reviews the issue of which, if any, courses should be prerequisites for others in order to balance a tiered curriculum for the major with the needs of general education students. Flexibility of course offerings is a scheduling goal in order to ensure that our program is accessible to working, non-traditional students and student athletes.

Students completing the USM philosophy major have been successful in attaining admission to graduate school in both philosophy and other areas and also in being admitted to law school. Our majors have also go on to work for non-profit organizations, health care companies, schools, and small businesses.

b. *If your department/program does NOT have any student learning outcome statements yet, please check here_____.*

2: How and When will the Learning Outcomes be assessed?

a. *Briefly describe the forms of evidence that were utilized this past year to demonstrate students' accomplishment of the learning outcome(s) selected, and when you implemented the assessment.*

Our program is writing intensive. The majority of graded work in our classes centers on many written scholarly papers. The Faculty relied on collective discussions of our evaluations of students' written work including the collective faculty assessment of this year's senior theses and defenses. The aim of the faculty is to establish some base-line writing requirements to improve the quality of written work.

b. *If your department/program did NOT assess any outcomes in the past year, please check here_____.*

3: How did you use the Assessment results to Improve Student Learning?

a. *Briefly describe your unit's process for using the assessment data to improve student learning, and state what improvements or changes are being planned based upon the assessment results.*

We use a portion of our department meetings each year to discuss student outcomes and the ways in which we should address any curricular changes.

b. *If your department has NOT reviewed any assessment results in the past year, please check here_____.*