

REPORT

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT GRADUATE ASSESSMENT, 2013: PROCESS AND RESULTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION: The Graduate Program Objectives	p. 2
II. OVERVIEW: PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES	p. 3
II.a. The Basic Structure of the Philosophy M.A. Program	
II.b. Assessment Strategies As Related To The Program Structure	p.3
II.c. Student Progress Toward Program Objectives As Related To The Program Structure	
Table 1: PHILOSOPHY MA PROGRAM LEARNING OBJECTIVES	
III. ONE BY ONE: DETAILS OF INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT MECHANISMS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL SUCCESS, FOR EACH PROGRAM OBJECTIVE	p. 7
IV. ALL TOGETHER: ASSESSMENT FINDINGS AND FOLLOW-UP PROGRAM REVISION	p. 23
IV.a. Summary Data For Formal Program Assessment.	
TABLE 2: OVERALL PHIL 896 EXAM RESULTS	
TABLE 3: INDIVIDUAL PHIL 896 EXAM RESULTS	
TABLE 4: NO. OF STUDENTS COMPLETING THESIS AND ORAL DEFENSE	
IV.b. Assessment Follow-Up: Program and Practice Revision	
IV.c. Further Examples of Assessment Follow-up	
IV.d. More Direct Assessment	
V. CONCLUSION AND ADDENDUM: ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY ELECTIVE	p. 31

I. INTRODUCTION: The Graduate Program Objectives

Students who seek our Philosophy M.A. fall into one or more of three broad categories: those who intend the M.A. as a step along the road to admission to a doctoral or professional degree (most go on to the philosophy doctorate or to the J.D., but some have entered doctoral programs in other disciplines); those who intend the M.A. as a terminal degree enabling them to teach lower division philosophy courses in baccalaureate or two-year colleges, or to improve their credentials for other teaching jobs; and those who intend to enhance their abilities in other careers or who study philosophy for their own intellectual enrichment.

Our M.A. program's nine learning objectives pertain to students in all these three categories, although some are more pertinent to students on one category more than the others, here is a list of our M.A. program's learning objectives. All our graduate courses are designed to enable students to meet one or more of these objectives.

1. Demonstrate advanced knowledge of the history and current state of the discipline of philosophy
2. Demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of representative philosophical issues and ways of dealing with them
3. Demonstrate a mature capacity to apply philosophical methods to intellectual problems and to engage in philosophical discussions meeting the standards of the discipline
4. Apply advanced analytic skills
5. Apply advanced interpretive skills
6. Demonstrate mastery of the imaginative development of abstract formulations and their concrete applications
7. Demonstrate mastery of the imaginative development of abstract formulations and their concrete applications Ph.D. level
8. Develop the philosophical skills and knowledge necessary to teach philosophy at the community college (lower-division) level

9. Demonstrate the capacity to study philosophy beyond the undergraduate level for the purposes of self-enrichment or to acquire additional expertise related to their professions

In the report that follows, we first explain in Section I, in both narrative and tabular form, the points in the course of study where we assess whether the student has achieved the various objectives. In Section II, we describe in detail the initial points in the course of study where students are introduced to the skills and knowledge needed to achieve each of the learning objectives, then the mid-course points where they build these out, and then the culminating experiences where they integrate the objectives and demonstrate their mastery. We also present the rubrics we apply to students' products at mid-course, and at the culmination points, to assess whether students have achieved the objectives. Section III provides quantitative reports of student learning outcomes. Section IV reports the changes we have made as a result of assessment results.

II. OVERVIEW: PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

II.a. The Basic Structure of the Philosophy M.A. Program

In addition to the graduate seminars and other regular coursework that our students take, there are three required courses that form the backbone of the philosophy department's MA program, and the benchmarks for students' courses of study. These provide the occasions for the introduction, practice, and final demonstration of mastery of the program's student learning outcomes:

- Phil 715: Seminar on Philosophical Writing (first semester of graduate work) introduces student learning outcomes and provides a first opportunity to develop and practice the requisite skills.
- Phil 896: Directed Readings in Philosophy (second or third semester of graduate work) is the first point at which outcomes 1, 2, 7, and 8 are assessed. This leads up to a mid-course of study a comprehensive exam. The Graduate Coordinators make up and administer the exam, which also is graded by four of the Graduate Faculty (who alternate), with the Chair breaking ties. Thus, each year the entire Graduate faculty participates in making the assessment.

- Phil 898: Culminating Experience, which includes a written thesis *and* oral defense, is the point at which outcomes 1 through 6 are both assessed twice, and outcome 9 is also assessed.

II.b. Assessment Strategies As Related To The Program Structure

A programmatic assessment approach should, we believe, be cost-effective by providing both guidance for individual student outcome improvement and data for improvement of the program as a whole. We have attempted to develop such an assessment strategy. In our report we describe the instruments we use to effect two-fold assessment results. In doing so, we are able to keep individual students' learning experiences in courses closely aligned with the overall program objectives.

Students' mastery of these program objectives is assessed in *three ways* that all work in concert with one another and have significant overlap.

In Phil 715, the required gateway course, students are introduced to and practice each of the learning outcomes through a program consisting of weekly assignments that familiarize students with professional-level philosophical research, writing, and presentation skills, all of which contribute to the students' semester-long construction of an extended philosophical interpretation and argument. Here learning outcomes are introduced, and assessed individually, but summarized assessment is undertaken during our Graduate Faculty planning meetings mainly as instructors' reports on and critiques of the effectiveness of the course in achieving its programmatic aims.

The formal instruments used for summarized assessment are the exam at the conclusion of Phil 896, which occurs about mid-way during the student's course of study and assesses whether students generally make satisfactory progress, and the rubrics we apply to the thesis portion and the oral defense portion of Phil 898, which assess student learning outcomes as manifested in the two-part Culminating Experience (the written Thesis and the public Oral Defense).

Formal summary assessment occurs first as part of Phil 896, a course in which students practice written presentational skills needed for research and teaching, including the ability to recall and present philosophers' views and their arguments for those views without recourse to notes or texts. The students sit a 3-hour closed-book written exam in which they write three essays in response to prompts given by the faculty. They are required to

organize their knowledge of important core topics in the history and for the contemporary state of the discipline and then apply it skillfully in response to questions within a short time frame. For each student unable to execute this work satisfactorily, we investigate why that individual has failed to meet mid-course benchmarks for achieving programmatic student learning outcomes. Any pattern that emerges calls for revision of our advising, course content, or degree requirement program components.

The 896 exam also serves as a means of ensuring that students ought to proceed to the culminating experience, which is a standard use of comprehensive exams in post-baccalaureate education in philosophy. Therefore, additional bench-mark criteria beyond those drawn from the specified program objectives are applied to determine passing and failing grades on the exam.

Assessment continues with the products of the Culminating Experience, for which graduate students research and write a professional-level philosophical essay and then defend it publicly as one might in discussion at a professional meeting. The Culminating Experience thus includes demonstration of mastery of extended philosophical interpretation and argument made in writing, ability to respond to criticism through several drafts, oral presentation of the material from this essay to the faculty and students who attend their defense, and then response to questions from those attendees on the written work and oral presentation.

II.c. Student Progress Toward Program Objectives As Related To The Program Structure

Following is a table showing where in the program progress of different sorts toward these outcomes is made.

TABLE 1: PHILOSOPHY MA PROGRAM LEARNING OBJECTIVES

	TABLE 1: PHILOSOPHY MA PROGRAM LEARNING OBJECTIVES								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8*	9
REQUIRED PHILOSOPHY COURSES	Demonstrate advanced knowledge of the history and current state of the discipline of philosophy	Demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of representative philosophical issues and ways of dealing with them	Demonstrate a mature capacity to apply philosophical methods to intellectual problems and to engage in philosophical discussions meeting the standards of the discipline	Apply advanced analytic skills	Apply advanced interpretive skills	Demonstrate mastery of the imaginative development of abstract formulations and their concrete applications	Demonstrate mastery of the imaginative development of abstract formulations and their concrete applications Ph.D. level	Develop the philosophical skills and knowledge necessary to teach philosophy at the community college (lower-division) level	Demonstrate the capacity to study philosophy beyond the undergraduate level for the purposes of self-enrichment or to acquire additional expertise related to their professions
715	I, D	I, D	I, D	I, D	I, D	I, D	I, D	I, D	I, D
896	M	M					M	M	

898 (thesis)	M	M	M	M	M	M			M
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I = Introduced, D= Developed and Practiced with Feedback, M = Demonstrated at the Mastery Level Appropriate for Graduate Students

*The Learning Outcome referenced here is the mastery of requisite knowledge for teaching the usual Introduction to Philosophy classes and the skill to present the knowledge clearly enough, and without notes, to beginning students. For general teaching skills and strategies, students participate in the Graduate Teaching Associate program.

III. ONE BY ONE: DETAILS OF INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT MECHANISMS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL SUCCESS, FOR EACH PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

1 Demonstrate advanced knowledge of the history and current state of the discipline of philosophy

Introduction to Outcome

Pre-requisites

Students are expected to have taken undergraduate history of philosophy courses in ancient philosophy and modern philosophy before receiving their B.A.. Courses that include current states in ethics and in metaphysics/epistemology (broadly construed) also are pre-requisites. Students who enter conditionally classified because they lack one or more pre-requisites must take these undergraduate courses as early as possible in their courses of study.

Introduction at Graduate Level

Students are first introduced to professional-level philosophical practice, which includes engaging in contemporary philosophical debates *via* engaging the history of these debates, in Phil 715. Among the assignments in that class, the following provide opportunities for students to demonstrate this kind of knowledge:

- Philosophical Research: three possible topics for a philosophical paper, with a list of seven articles, book chapters, etc. relevant to those topics

- Philosophical Research: paragraph-long summaries of the articles, etc. relevant to one of those topics presenting the main thesis and form of argument of each
- Argument Presentation: a reconstruction of the main argument from one of these articles

These assignments require the students to demonstrate the ability to successfully conduct research on the history and current state of the discipline, to accurately report on that research, and to articulate the findings of that research in a form suitable for professional philosophical writing.

Elevation, Refinement, and Practice Application of Outcome

All of the graduate seminars in philosophy provide opportunities for graduate students to elevate and refine their knowledge of the history and current state of the discipline. Modes of assessment used in graduate seminars are written papers and oral presentations. Students must demonstrate the ability to conduct independent philosophical research and to clearly and accurately report the results of that research in a form suitable for professional philosophical engagement.

Department Outcomes assessment

The philosophy department tests the students' acquisition of the knowledge of the history and current state of the discipline in *three* separate ways: the written exam at the conclusion of Phil 896, the written thesis portion of Phil 898, and the oral defense portion of Phil 898.

- The material on which the students write for the 896 exam are texts from the philosophical canon. Students are assessed according to their ability to demonstrate that they understand these canonical works and can answer questions about them, in the time allotted, without notes clearly and accurately. The topics on which they write are live topics in the current state of the discipline, and so their essays also demonstrate their acquisition of knowledge of such topics. Students must be able to:
 - articulate the theses at issue,
 - present the philosopher's arguments in favor and against these theses, and
 - compare and contrast different philosophical approaches to these theses.
- The written portion of Phil 898 is a thesis the standard of which is a professional piece of philosophical writing. Because of the nature of

professional philosophical writing, to meet this standard, students must

- demonstrate a sophisticated and comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter at hand including its historical roots and its relation to contemporary work in the field,
 - demonstrate their ability to execute philosophical research,
 - interpret and articulate philosophical theses and arguments, and
 - draw upon their knowledge of these subject matters in constructing a sustained defense of an original thesis.
- The oral defense portion of 898 requires the student to present and defend an original thesis, success in which likewise requires students to demonstrate these kinds of knowledge.

As the assessment procedures for this outcome are the 896 exam, is the submission of a written thesis and oral defense of that thesis, the success of our student population in achieving it is demonstrated in the data presented earlier in this section concerning success rates of the exam and the number of students successfully completing the culminating experience. Also relevant is the data on student success in having their writing accepted for presentation and publication and in gaining admittance to PhD programs presented farther on, both of which require the exercise of this skill.

2 Demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of representative philosophical issues and ways of dealing with them

Introduction to Outcome

Pre-requisites

Before receiving their B.A. students are expected to have taken undergraduate courses that have introduced them to representative philosophical issues, including both historical encounters with these issues—ancient and modern—and contemporary ones—in courses in ethics and metaphysics/epistemology, broadly construed. A course in formal logic, which is an important tool for dealing with philosophical issues is also a pre-requisite. Students who enter conditionally classified because they lack one or more pre-requisites must take these undergraduate courses as early as possible in their courses of study.

Introduction at Graduate Level

Students are first introduced to ways of coming to grasp and deal with representative philosophical issues in Phil 715. Among the assignments in

that class, the following provide opportunities for students to demonstrate this kind of knowledge:

- Philosophical Research: three possible topics for a philosophical paper, with a list of seven articles, book chapters, etc. relevant to those topics
- Philosophical Research: paragraph-long summaries of the articles, etc. relevant to one of those topics presenting the main thesis and form of argument of each
- Argument Presentation: a reconstruction of the main argument from one of these articles
- Objecting to an Argument: an objection to one of the premises or form of the argument reconstructed
- Responding to Objections: three responses on behalf of the philosopher being engaged to the objection raised, with rebuttals of each
- Original Thesis: an original philosophical thesis stemming from the objection raised

These assignments require students to demonstrate their ability to conduct research on representative philosophical issues and to engage with those issues in ways appropriate to professional philosophical practice.

Elevation, Refinement, and Practice Application of Outcome

All of the graduate seminars in philosophy provide opportunities for graduate students to elevate and refine their grasp of representative philosophical issues and ways of dealing with them. Modes of assessment used in graduate seminars are written papers and oral presentations. Students must demonstrate the ability to conduct independent philosophical research and to engage the philosophical content of that research by critiquing and assessing it and presenting original philosophical theses in response to these assessments.

Department Outcomes Assessment

The philosophy department tests the students' sophisticated grasp of representative philosophical issues and ways of dealing with them in *three* separate ways: the written exam at the conclusion of Phil 896, the written thesis portion of Phil 898, and the oral defense portion of Phil 898.

- In order to pass the written exam at the conclusion of Phil 896 students must

- demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of the representative philosophical issues from the texts, and
- in comparing the texts to one another, demonstrate an ability to deal with these issues,
- be able to clearly articulate the theses at hand,
- present the reasons for and against each view, and
- compare and contrast these view with each other.
- The written portion of Phil 898 is a thesis the standard of which is a professional piece of philosophical writing. Because of the nature of professional philosophical writing, to meet this standard students must
 - demonstrate their grasp of representative philosophical issues in presenting the contemporary literature on their topic,
 - demonstrate the ability to deal with these issues by engaging with this literature (presenting objections, considering responses to these objections, replying with rebuttals to these), and
 - present an original thesis of their own.
- The oral defense portion of 898 requires the student to present and defend an original thesis, success in which likewise requires students to demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of representative philosophical issues and an ability to deal with them (in this context, in response to questions from the audience).

As the assessment procedures for this outcome are the 896 exam, is the submission of a written thesis and oral defense of that thesis, the success of our student population in achieving it is demonstrated in the data presented earlier in this section concerning success rates of the exam and the number of students successfully completing the culminating experience. Also relevant is the data on student success in having their writing accepted for presentation and publication and in gaining admittance to PhD programs presented farther on, both of which require the exercise of this skill.

3 Demonstrate a mature capacity to apply philosophical methods to intellectual problems and to engage in philosophical discussions meeting the standards of the discipline

Prerequisites

Students are expected to have taken undergraduate courses in which they are introduced to standard philosophical methods, which include. Some

representative philosophical methods meeting the standard of the discipline are argument reconstruction, critique of arguments, responding to critiques of arguments, and generally engaging the reasons in favor or against a given philosophical thesis. These methods are used in both written and oral philosophical engagement. Students who enter conditionally classified because they lack one or more pre-requisites must take these undergraduate courses as early as possible in their courses of study.

Introduction at Graduate Level

Students are first introduced to professional-level philosophical methods in Phil 715. Among the assignments in that class, the following provide opportunities for students to demonstrate this kind of knowledge:

- Philosophical Research: three possible topics for a philosophical paper, with a list of seven articles, book chapters, etc. relevant to those topics
- Philosophical Research: paragraph-long summaries of the articles, etc. relevant to one of those topics presenting the main thesis and form of argument of each
- Argument Presentation: a reconstruction of the main argument from one of these articles
- Objecting to an Argument: an objection to one of the premises or form of the argument reconstructed
- Responding to Objections: three responses on behalf of the philosopher being engaged to the objection raised, with rebuttals of each
- Original Thesis: an original philosophical thesis stemming from the objection raised.

Elevation, Refinement, and Practice Application of Outcome

Students are given the opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their application of these methods during the course of Phil 715 and in the other graduate seminars that they take. Modes of assessment used in graduate seminars are written papers and oral presentations. Students must demonstrate the ability to apply these methods to the topics of each seminar.

Department Outcomes Assessment

The philosophy department tests the mature capacity to apply philosophical methods to intellectual programs and to engage in philosophical discussions meeting the standards of the discipline in *two* ways: the written thesis portion of Phil 898 and the oral defense portion of Phil 898.

- The written portion of Phil 898 is a thesis the standard of which is a professional piece of philosophical writing. Students must
 - demonstrate the ability to apply a variety of philosophical methods to in a sustained way to a single topic, including
 - presenting research on that topic,
 - reconstructing arguments found in that research,
 - critiquing these arguments,
 - responding to these critiques of arguments, and
 - generally engaging the reasons in favor or against a given philosophical thesis critiquing the views of other philosophers working on the topic,
- The oral defense portion of 898 requires the student to present and defend an original thesis, success in which likewise requires students to demonstrate a mature capacity to apply these methods.

As the assessment procedures for this outcome are the submission of a written thesis and oral defense of that thesis, the success of our student population in achieving it is demonstrated in the data presented earlier in this section concerning the number of students successfully completing the culminating experience. Also relevant is the data on student success in having their writing accepted for presentation and publication and in gaining admittance to PhD programs presented farther on, both of which require the exercise of this skill.

4 Apply advanced analytic skills

Introduction to Outcome

Prerequisites

Before receiving their B.A. Students are expected to have taken undergraduate courses in which they are introduced to the analytic skills employed in philosophers. Courses in the history of philosophy or contemporary issues provide an introduction to some of these skills, and a course in formal logic, which is a particular analytic skill unto itself, is also a pre-requisite. Students who enter conditionally classified because they lack one or more pre-requisites must take these undergraduate courses as early as possible in their courses of study.

Introduction at Graduate Level

Students are first introduced to the application of advanced analytic skills in Phil 715. Among the assignments in that class, the following provide opportunities for students to demonstrate this kind of knowledge:

- Philosophical Research: three possible topics for a philosophical paper, with a list of seven articles, book chapters, etc. relevant to those topics
- Philosophical Research: paragraph-long summaries of the articles, etc. relevant to one of those topics presenting the main thesis and form of argument of each
- Argument Presentation: a reconstruction of the main argument from one of these articles
- Objecting to an Argument: an objection to one of the premises or form of the argument reconstructed
- Responding to Objections: three responses on behalf of the philosopher being engaged to the objection raised, with rebuttals of each
- Original Thesis: an original philosophical thesis stemming from the objection raised.

Elevation, Refinement, and Practice Application of Outcome

Students are given the opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their application of these methods during the course of Phil 715 and in the other graduate seminars that they take. Modes of assessment used in graduate seminars are written papers and oral presentations. Students must demonstrate the ability to apply these skills to the topics of each seminar.

Department Outcomes Assessment

The philosophy department tests advanced analytic skills in *two* ways: the written thesis portion of Phil 898 and the oral defense portion of Phil 898.

- The written portion of Phil 898 is a thesis the standard of which is a professional piece of philosophical writing. Because of the nature of professional philosophical writing, to meet this standard, students must demonstrate advanced analytic skills in:
 - the interpretation and presentation of arguments,
 - the formulation of objections,
 - the formulation of responses to these objections and rebuttals to these, and
 - arguing for an original philosophical thesis.

- The oral defense portion of 898 requires the student to present and defend an original thesis, success in which likewise requires students to apply advanced analytic skills. (in this context, in response to questions from the audience).

As the assessment procedures for this outcome are the submission of a written thesis and oral defense of that thesis, the success of our student population in achieving it is demonstrated in the data presented earlier in this section concerning the number of students successfully completing the culminating experience. Also relevant is the data on student success in having their writing accepted for presentation and publication and in gaining admittance to PhD programs presented farther on, both of which require the exercise of this skill.

5 Apply advanced interpretive skills

Introduction to Outcome

Prerequisites

Before receiving their B.A. Students are expected to have taken undergraduate courses in the history of philosophy, ancient and modern, in which they are introduced to the interpretive skills employed in historical scholarship in philosophy. Courses on contemporary issues in ethics and metaphysics/epistemology (broadly construed) are also prerequisites and introduce the student to the skill of interpreting contemporary work in philosophy. A course in formal logic is also a prerequisite and introduces students to a valuable tool in philosophical interpretation.

Introduction at Graduate Level

Students are first introduced to professional-level philosophical interpretation in Phil 715. Among the assignments in that class, the following provide opportunities for students to demonstrate this skill:

- Philosophical Research: three possible topics for a philosophical paper, with a list of seven articles, book chapters, etc. relevant to those topics
- Philosophical Research: paragraph-long summaries of the articles, etc. relevant to one of those topics presenting the main thesis and form of argument of each
- Argument Presentation: a reconstruction of the main argument from one of these articles

- Responding to Objections: three responses on behalf of the philosopher being engaged to the objection raised, with rebuttals of each

Elevation, Refinement, and Practice Application of Outcome

Students are given the opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their application of these skills during the course of Phil 715 and in the other graduate seminars that they take. Modes of assessment used in graduate seminars are written papers and oral presentations. Students must demonstrate the ability to apply these skills to the topics of each seminar.

Department Outcomes Assessment

The philosophy department tests advanced interpretive skills in *two* ways: the written thesis portion of Phil 898 and the oral defense portion of Phil 898.

- The written portion of Phil 898 is a thesis the standard of which is a professional piece of philosophical writing. Because of the nature of professional philosophical writing, to meet this standard, students must demonstrate advanced interpretive skills in:
 - the research and presentation of the material that must be included and engaged in any such paper, and
 - the consideration of objections to this material, and responses to these objections.
- The oral defense portion of 898 requires the student to present and defend an original thesis, success in which likewise requires students to apply advanced interpretive skills. Students must:
 - situate this thesis for their audience within the broader dialectic to which it is a contribution, and
 - interpret philosophical questions from the audience about their thesis and formulate responses to these.

As the assessment procedures for this outcome are the submission of a written thesis and oral defense of that thesis, the success of our student population in achieving it is demonstrated in the data presented earlier in this section concerning the number of students successfully completing the culminating experience. Also relevant is the data on student success in having their writing accepted for presentation and publication and in gaining admittance to PhD programs presented farther on, both of which require the exercise of this skill.

6 Demonstrate mastery of the imaginative development of abstract formulations and their concrete applications

Introduction to Outcome

Prerequisites

Before receiving their B.A. students are expected to have taken undergraduate courses in on contemporary issues in ethics and metaphysics/epistemology (broadly construed) in which they are introduced to the imaginative development of abstract formulations and their concrete applications.

Introduction at Graduate Level

Students are first introduced to professional-level philosophical originality in Phil 715. Among the assignments in that class, the following provide opportunities for students to demonstrate this skill:

- Objecting to an Argument: an objection to one of the premises or form of the argument reconstructed
- Responding to Objections: three responses on behalf of the philosopher being engaged to the objection raised, with rebuttals of each
- Original Thesis: an original philosophical thesis stemming from the objection raised.

Elevation, Refinement, and Practice Application of Outcome

Students are given the opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their application of these skills during the course of Phil 715 and in the other graduate seminars that they take. Modes of assessment used in graduate seminars are written papers and oral presentations. Students must demonstrate the ability to apply these skills to the topics of each seminar.

Department Outcomes Assessment

The philosophy department tests the imaginative development of abstract formulations and their concrete applications in *two* ways: the written thesis portion of Phil 898 and the oral defense portion of Phil 898.

- The written portion of Phil 898 is a thesis the standard of which is a professional piece of philosophical writing. Because of the nature of professional philosophical writing, to meet this standard, students must:

- present and defend an original thesis,
- consider consequences and/or applications of this thesis, and
- consider possible objections to this thesis.
- The oral defense portion of 898 requires the student to present and defend an original thesis, success in which likewise requires students to demonstrate this skill. Students must:
 - respond to questions from the audience with novel philosophical content over and above that presented in their thesis.

As the assessment procedures for this outcome are the submission of a written thesis and oral defense of that thesis, the success of our student population in achieving it is demonstrated in the data presented earlier in this section concerning the number of students successfully completing the culminating experience. Also relevant is the data on student success in having their writing accepted for presentation and publication and in gaining admittance to PhD programs presented farther on, both of which require the exercise of this skill.

7 Develop the philosophical skills and knowledge necessary to do graduate work at the Ph.D. level

Introduction at Graduate Level

Students are first introduced to the philosophical skills necessary to do graduate work at the Ph.D. level in Phil 715. Among the assignments in that class, the following provide opportunities for students to demonstrate this kind of knowledge:

- Philosophical Research: three possible topics for a philosophical paper, with a list of seven articles, book chapters, etc. relevant to those topics
- Philosophical Research: paragraph-long summaries of the articles, etc. relevant to one of those topics presenting the main thesis and form of argument of each
- Argument Presentation: a reconstruction of the main argument from one of these articles
- Objecting to an Argument: an objection to one of the premises or form of the argument reconstructed

- Responding to Objections: three responses on behalf of the philosopher being engaged to the objection raised, with rebuttals of each
- Original Thesis: an original philosophical thesis stemming from the objection raised
- Incorporating Feedback: second draft of a paper revised in light of instructor's comments
- Oral Presentation: oral presentation of paper to course participants

These assignments require the students to demonstrate the ability to successfully conduct research in philosophy and to exercise the skills necessary for doing graduate work at the Ph.D. level including those involved in philosophical research, writing, and oral presentation.

Elevation, Refinement, and Practice Application of Outcome

Students are given the opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their application of these skills and knowledge during the course of Phil 715 and in the other graduate seminars that they take. Modes of assessment used in graduate seminars are written papers and oral presentations. Students must demonstrate the ability to apply these skills to the topics of each seminar.

Department Outcomes Assessment

The philosophy department tests the students' development of philosophical skills and knowledge necessary to do graduate work at the Ph.D. level using the written exam at the conclusion of Phil 896.

- In order to pass this exam students must
 - demonstrate the ability to draw on their knowledge of representative philosophical topics from the history of philosophy, and
 - write articulately about these topics.

By way of measuring our success in achieving this outcome and exceeding the standard set by it, it is worth noting the long list of doctoral programs to which our recent graduates have been accepted (see section 7.5).

8 Develop the philosophical skills and knowledge necessary to teach philosophy at the community college (lower-division) level

Introduction at Graduate Level

Students are first introduced to the philosophical skills and knowledge that are necessary to teach philosophy at the community college (lower-division) level in Phil 715. Among the assignments in that class, the following provide opportunities for students to demonstrate this kind of skill and knowledge are:

- Philosophical Research: three possible topics for a philosophical paper, with a list of seven articles, book chapters, etc. relevant to those topics
- Philosophical Research: paragraph-long summaries of the articles, etc. relevant to one of those topics presenting the main thesis and form of argument of each
- Argument Presentation: a reconstruction of the main argument from one of these articles
- Objecting to an Argument: an objection to one of the premises or form of the argument reconstructed
- Responding to Objections: three responses on behalf of the philosopher being engaged to the objection raised, with rebuttals of each
- Oral Presentation: oral presentation of paper to course participants

Elevation, Refinement, and Practice Application of Outcome

Students are given the opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their application of these skills and knowledge during the course of Phil 715 and in the other graduate seminars that they take. Modes of assessment used in graduate seminars are written papers and oral presentations. Students must demonstrate the ability to apply these skills to the topics of each seminar. Additionally, we offer two courses on teaching philosophy—Phil 717 and Phil 718—in which students can hone their teaching craft. We also provide opportunities for students to teach for remuneration.

Department Outcomes Assessment

The philosophy department tests the students' development of philosophical skills and knowledge necessary to teach philosophy at the community college (lower-division) level using the written exam at the conclusion of Phil 896.

- In order to pass this exam students must:
 - demonstrate knowledge of historical texts that would be appropriate to teach at the community college (lower-division) level,
 - demonstrate the ability to answer questions about these texts that would be expected to arise in teaching at that level,
 - clearly articulate the main theses and positions found in those texts,
 - compare and contrast these theses and positions with one another.

By way of measurement, the below is a list of the schools at which our students have earned teaching positions.

Recent graduates have been hired at CSU, Sacramento (3 recent grads hired), Sacramento City College, San Francisco State University, Santa Barbara City College, Green River Community College (Washington), De Anza College, Madison Technical College (Wisconsin) and Diablo Valley College.

9 Demonstrate the capacity to study philosophy beyond the undergraduate level for the purposes of self-enrichment or to acquire additional expertise related to their professions

Introduction at Graduate Level

Students are first introduced to the capacities that are necessary to study philosophy independently in Phil 715. Among the assignments in that class, the following provide opportunities for students to demonstrate this kind of skill and knowledge are:

- Philosophical Research: three possible topics for a philosophical paper, with a list of seven articles, book chapters, etc. relevant to those topics
- Philosophical Research: paragraph-long summaries of the articles, etc. relevant to one of those topics presenting the main thesis and form of argument of each
- Argument Presentation: a reconstruction of the main argument from one of these articles
- Objecting to an Argument: an objection to one of the premises or form of the argument reconstructed

- Responding to Objections: three responses on behalf of the philosopher being engaged to the objection raised, with rebuttals of each
- Abstracts/Proposals: three abstracts of the paper being constructed of 200, 350, and 500 words
- Oral Presentation: oral presentation of paper to course participants

Elevation, Refinement, and Practice Application of Outcome

Students are given the opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their application of these skills and knowledge during the course of Phil 715 and in the other graduate seminars that they take. Modes of assessment used in graduate seminars are written papers and oral presentations. Students must demonstrate the ability to apply these skills to the topics of each seminar.

Department Outcomes Assessment

The philosophy department tests the students' the capacity to study philosophy beyond the undergraduate level for the purposes of self-enrichment or to acquire additional expertise related to their professions using in *two* ways: the proposal for culminating experience and the oral defense portion of Phil 898. For the proposal students must:

- demonstrate their ability to identify interesting and important topics, and pursue them.

For the oral defense students must:

- demonstrate an ability to conduct philosophical research,
- formulate an original thesis,
- and discuss this thesis with the audience.

As the assessment procedures for this outcome are the submission of a proposal for the thesis and the oral defense of that thesis, the success of our student population in achieving it is demonstrated in the data presented earlier in this section concerning the number of students successfully completing the culminating experience.

IV. ALL TOGETHER: ASSESSMENT FINDINGS AND FOLLOW-UP PROGRAM REVISION

IV.a. Summary Data For Formal Program Assessment

The following tables include data about the *three* ways in which formal summary assessment takes place: the exam at the conclusion of Phil 896, the written thesis portion of Phil 898, and the oral defense portion of 898.

TABLE 2: OVERALL PHIL 896 EXAM RESULTS			
	Took Exam	Passed	Failed
F 07	11	10	1
S 08	2	2	0
F 08	19	11	8
S 09	10	9	1
F 09	15	12	3
S 10	19	16	3
F 10	13	13	0
S 11	22	20	2
F 11	25	20	5

S 12	27	24	3
F 12	24	23	1
S 13	16	14	2

TABLE 3: INDIVIDUAL PHIL 896 EXAM RESULTS			
	TOOK EXAM	PASSED	FAILED AND ACTION
Fall 2007	11	10	1 1 student failed for the second time and therefore was not permitted to continue in the program
Spring 2008	2	2	0
Fall 2008	19	11	8 5 students took exam again after this and passed. 1 student left program 1 student failed for the first time and transferred to Hum Dept 1 student failed for the first time here, took exam again later, failed again
Spring 2009	10	9	1 1 student took exam again later and failed. See below

Fall 2009	15	12	3 1 student retook exam and passed. 1 student took exam again later, failed, and moved to Humanities Dept 1 student failed for the second time and therefore was not permitted to continue in the program
Spring 2010	19	16	3 1 student failed for the second time, and therefore was not permitted to continue in the program. 1 student took the exam later and passed 1 student failed for the second time and moved to Humanities Dept
Fall 2010	13	13	0
Spring 2011	22	20	2 1 student took the exam later and passed 1 student took exam again later, failed, and therefore was not permitted to continue in the program..
Fall 2011	25	20	5 1 student will take the exam again with DPRC. 2 students took the exam later and passed

			1 student had enrolled against advisement 1 student failed for the second time, and therefore was not permitted to continue in the program.
Spring 2012	27	24	3 1 student took exam again later, failed, and therefore was not permitted to continue in the program. 2 students took the exam later and passed
Fall 2012	24	23	1 1 student failed for the second time, and therefore was not permitted to continue in the program.
Spring 2013	16	14	2

During the period covered in our Sixth Cycle Review, 174 students have passed the exam, demonstrating mastery of the skills and knowledge stated in program objectives 1, 2, 7 and 8. 23 of these did not pass on their first try, demonstrating that they had not yet mastered the requisite skills and knowledge, but then took the exam and passed on a second try after spending more time in the program in order to acquire the requisite skills and knowledge, or after receiving a reasonable accommodation to a disability that had not been requested for the first attempt.

The Graduate Coordinators and Department Chair, and the Graduate Faculty as a whole, discuss cases of failure to determine causes. These discussions have been extremely helpful in guiding advisors in being better able to judge, based on the student's record in our program, when the student has mastered, and therefore is ready to demonstrate, the expected mid-course of study skills.

During this 6 year period, however, six students failed twice and were dropped from the program. We have analyzed these students' records and found that their records in graduate level philosophy courses prior to taking, and to retaking, the exam were not consistent with their having mastered the requisite skills and knowledge. One of these students subsequently transferred to the Humanities M.A. after attempting and failing the exam twice; he had taken only two graduate level courses before the second attempt. Another came from one of the least rigorous CSU undergraduate philosophy programs (which did not even offer symbolic logic), took comparatively few graduate level courses, started taking courses related to her job in another department alongside her philosophy courses, had a baby, and sat the exam the second time without having attended any of the workshops and study groups during either semester in which she attempted it. Another subsequently transferred to the Political Science MA but has not earned that degree. One had enrolled in 8 graduate seminars prior to taking the exam twice, but received credit for only 2 of them. One had been on and off and on probation and might have been dropped from the program for poor performance had he not failed the exam twice. As for the sixth, at his request his physician discussed the matter with the department chair; if an effective accommodation for his particular disability can be found (the accommodation he requested on his second try worsened rather than improved his performance) he may be permitted to reapply to the program.

The 896 exam is one of three ways in which our student learning outcomes are assessed. This exam is a means of mid-course of study assessment. It enables us to be sure the individual student is well prepared to cut free of seminar-directed research and organize a major project on her/his own. And the collective results provide important data on the effectiveness of our seminar instruction and advising during students' initial semesters in the program. The other two assessment instruments are the two parts of the culminating experience: the written thesis and oral defense.

Below are quantitative data on the completion of the culminating experience.

TABLE 4: NO. STUDENTS COMPLETING THESIS AND ORAL DEFENSE				
	Summer	Fall	Spring	Total
AY 2007-8	3	4	1	8

AY 2008-9	1	2	12	15
AY 2009-10	0	2	10	12
AY 2010-11	1	2	11	14
AY 2011-12	0	11	15	26
AY 2012-13	0	8	13	16
Total	5	29	62	96
Six Yr. Average	1	5.7	9.5	16

During the period covered by this review, no student has attempted to submit or defend a thesis and ultimately failed. That is because we do not permit a thesis to be submitted until the thesis committee members agree independently from each other to advance the student to the oral defense stage, and also because, if problems with the student's argument are uncovered during public questioning at the oral defense stage, the thesis is not accepted until the arguments are revised to be responsive to the objections. During the course of supervising and advising on the thesis, committee members are charged with subjecting authors to sufficient queries and critiques to challenge their mastery of the skills needed for the oral defense. The oral defense ensures that students' achievement in writing the thesis has not relied too heavily on guidance from supervisor or other committee members.

Parenthetically, we have increased the number of degrees we are awarding every year (as shown in the charts above) while simultaneously increasing the standards for academic performance for our graduate students. (We now require a grade of A or A- in all classes below the 600-level for all of our graduate students.)

IV.b. Assessment Follow-Up: Program and Practice Revision

Assessment results have led to several important changes in the advising and instructional components of the program.

As a first example, the large number of failures in Fall '08 provided the Graduate Coordinator with a much better sense of how to determine when a student is ready to demonstrate mid-program mastery, and consequently greater accuracy in advising students so. After discussion at a Graduate Faculty Planning Meeting, we assigned the instructors of the PHIL 715 gateway course sections supplementary advising roles for the members of the cohorts formed by their enrollments in their sections. As these instructors are in the best position to evaluate students' readiness, they give students realistic guidance in regard to what further preparation will be needed to pass the 896 exam.

As a second example, three students overtly exhibited vast over-confidence about the Fall '11 administration and did not take advantage of the several methods offered to practice the relevant skills and knowledge presentations. Their failures were (used by faculty advisors to be) enormously heuristic not only to themselves but to other students.

As a third example, applying the assessment rubrics as guides while theses are under development enabled us to identify some common areas of under-preparedness, especially in students' ability to formulate feasible writing projects. As a result, we built better instruction for thesis writing into the gateway course on Philosophical Writing. As a further result, students have been able to keep in mind formulating a thesis proposal from the beginning of their graduate studies. They are better equipped to design an acceptable thesis proposal and to write the thesis taking fewer wrong turns. By this means, we are reducing time to degree.

IV.c. Further Examples of Assessment Follow-up

During our Graduate Faculty Planning Meetings, the Graduate Coordinators briefly review each student's and other faculty who know the student chime in. A component of the Graduate Coordinators' discussion of individual graduate students' progress is a report on the most recent findings from graduate assessment. Graduate assessment occurs at the end of every semester, when the comprehensive exam is given and oral defenses of theses are held. Planning Meetings usually occur at the beginning of the subsequent semester before instruction begins.

These reports not only enable us to determine objectively whether each of our students individually has achieved the program's learning outcomes. They also invite conversations among faculty about general demonstrations of students' learning.

General conclusions about the effectiveness of our instructional program are reached based on assessment reports and on the comments we ask each member of the Graduate Faculty to make, in turn as we go around the room, about means for improving standards in our program. We have, for example, eliminated a practice of long duration of assigning a conditional pass on the 896 exam, for which the student must write a remedial paper or engage in some other demonstration of competence, instead of failing the student. Serious weaknesses are evidence of failure to achieve one of the relevant learning outcomes, and the practice we now follow presumes that a student who has not risen to any one of our standards should not be passed.

A second example of the role of assessment in raising standards is our correlating the records of students who have had trouble passing the 896 exam, or meeting standards of writing our program objectives set for the thesis, with evidence from their transcripts an over-indulgence in courses below the 600 level, and uninspiring grades in such courses. As it happens, graduate students who attain Bs in such unchallenging (for graduate students) undergraduate work can maintain a 3.0 GPA when that GPA does not fully reflect their graduate level competence. As a result, we added a prohibition against students including any course below the 600 level on their ATCs unless an A or A- was earned in the course. This rule seems to have directed graduate students to take courses below the 600 level only if the course is directly relevant to their thesis topic or if it is a course they are preparing to teach (for example, some of the several human rights and global justice courses for a related thesis topic, or upper division Intermediate Philosophy of Art if they are preparing to teach the lower division Introduction to Philosophy of Art.)

IV.d. More Direct Assessment

Bluntly, one of the best ways of assessing whether our program objectives are being met is through the judgments made by professional peers of our program's products. We believe that, during the Sixth Program Review Cycle, we have made good progress in improving student learning outcome quality, which is the test of achieving our program objectives, as judged by professional peers.

Admission to doctoral programs depends to an important extent on the doctoral admissions committees' judgment of the applicants' writing samples. Our MA students who seek admission to doctoral programs have been very successful. Recent degree recipients ('11, '12 and '13 MA graduates) have been admitted (most with generous financial support) to philosophy doctoral programs at the following universities among others: Brown University, Boston University, City University of New York (CUNY), Claremont Graduate University, Columbia University, Duke University, Georgetown University, Marquette University, Ohio State University, SUNY Albany, SUNY Stony Brook, UC Davis, UC Santa Barbara, UC Irvine, UC Santa Cruz, UC San Diego, University of Chicago, University of Colorado (Boulder), University of Illinois at Champagne-Urbana, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Maryland, University of Massachusetts (Amherst), University of Miami, University of Missouri, University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), University of Texas, University of Utah, University of Virginia, University of Washington, Vanderbilt University, University of British Columbia, (Canada), Western Ontario University (Canada), and Edinburgh University (UK). Doctoral programs in religious studies, theology, and interdisciplinary area studies include University of Chicago, Boston University, Indiana University, Masaryk University (Czech Republic), University of Virginia, University of Washington, Graduate Theological Union, and Rice University. Law schools include Pittsburgh, Lewis and Clark, and William and Mary, as well as many in California. Other recent graduates are studying for doctorates in Sociology at the University of Sydney, Human Development at UC Berkeley, and Clinical Psychology at Palo Alto University (affiliated with Stanford University), and for an MS in Environmental Studies at Kingston University in London.

V. CONCLUSION AND ADDENDUM: ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY ELECTIVE

The above assessment report summarizes the Philosophy Department's Graduate Assessment efforts during the six years since our last program review. In this report, we have focused on achievement of our nine graduate program objectives.

These objectives constitute standards all students are expected to meet. They are not just aspirational; they are the outcomes that an individual's possession of our M.A. degree is expected to guarantee.

As mentioned in our introduction, however, our students fall roughly into three broad categories with different motivations for obtaining the degree. In this report we address assessment of objectives all students are expected to meet, regardless of their purposes. We do, however, have an additional program component that is elective and not required for the degree. It is a series of workshops, plus an apprenticeship program, that teaches M.A. students how to teach philosophy. Assessment instruments for this program are two-fold: (1) we run the T.E.E.F. student evaluation surveys separately each semester for sections in which graduate students are doing supervised teaching, and each semester the department chair makes sure that the mean score for our apprentice teachers is not inferior to the overall department mean, and (2) we do class visitations to observe individual graduate students who are apprentice teachers. The tenured faculty member who supervises our Graduate Teaching Associate Program quickly takes action in case of any failure to meet instructional standards.

We close this report with what might be called a “peer review” of the teaching to teach component of our M.A. program:

“Bellon, Christina [bellon@saclink.csus.edu]

Friday, January 11, 2013 2:52 PM

“Hi Shelley and Anita,

“I had planned to write you both to convey a few things. First, my thanks for forwarding to your grads my call for applications to our lecturer pool. Second, to let you know that of the 16 applications we received, almost half of them came from individuals who had an MA from your program. Of those applications we added 4 SFSU MA grads to our pool, in competition with several lecturers with PhDs or who were very senior ABDs. I ended up offering the three sections we had available this spring to three of your recent grads: Simona Capisani, Jonathan Chen, and Genevieve Wallace.

“Aside from this, what I really wanted to let you know was how impressed the entire committee was with the quality and caliber of these three. We’re aware they’re still very green lecturers, and I’m sure I’ll be doing quite a bit of handholding, but we’re confident our students will respond positively to them and that they will do a fine job with our introductory courses.

“I especially wanted to let you know how impressed I was with Simona. Her responses to our questions and hypotheticals about teaching indicated that

she is quite pedagogically sophisticated, despite not being very experienced. I especially appreciated her indication of when and why she changed an assignment or a teaching strategy, which included a very reasonable and thoughtful explanation of why the first attempt didn't work and why she's confident the revised version will. Of the three, she also seemed the most philosophically sophisticated as well. All were competent, of that no doubt, but she really should consider pursuing a PhD.

“You're clearly doing excellent work over there!

“Best regards and see you at the APA!

“Cheers,

“chris

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