

Summary of the Assessment of the Undergraduate Major in Philosophy

The 2001 assessment of our major in philosophy had three central components.

1. To resolve the concern expressed at the close of our last assessment: The 1998 assessment of our undergraduate major focused on the structure of our major and whether that structure fulfilled the goals we articulated then and which we continue to believe define the role of a major in philosophy. That assessment showed that the major was healthy, but concluded with a cautionary note concerning whether or not our breadth requirement was working in the way we had envisioned. One of the goals of this year's assessment was to see if that concern could be put to rest. An examination of the transcripts of the philosophy majors graduating in 2000 shows that the breadth requirement is being fulfilled as envisioned. It is worth noting that the "value studies" half of the requirement has been the more difficult requirement for the Department to staff. Our proposed hires over the next two years will alleviate any problem in this area.

2. To see if the Department continues to provide students with the information and skills essential for majors in philosophy: We repeated the strategies of the 1998 assessment, employing embedded questions and analysis of the performance of our majors in the three courses required for our major (Logic: 211, Ancient Philosophy: 430 and Modern Philosophy: 432.) . The results here were mixed; on the whole, our majors did no better than other students taking the courses. (See attached faculty reports.) The examination of the transcripts of our graduating majors (2000), however, shows that their average GPA was 3.361, significantly higher than the L & S average of 3.13. This suggests that students who do poorly at early stages of the major either leave the major or improve significantly over time. Our next assessment will look at ways to see how well students are grasping important concepts and skills at more advanced levels of the major. It is also worth noting that we are providing skills that transcend philosophy *per se*. On our student survey, majors were asked the following two questions:

Do you think that you have learned to recognize, construct and criticize arguments in philosophy and elsewhere as a result of your philosophy major?

Do you think that you are better at doing that (recognizing, constructing, and criticizing arguments) than students who have non-philosophy majors?

All of the students who responded to the survey answered in the affirmative to these two questions. Since such a large portion of our majors are double majors (60% in 2000), we think that this aspect of our service to our majors is particularly important.

3. To assess our progress towards meeting concerns expressed about our major in the recent Review of The Philosophy Department (2001): The recent Review affirmed the strength of our undergraduate major but noted three areas of concern: First, that students feel that some of our advanced courses are not being offered frequently enough. Second, that the advanced offerings are not offered with sufficient predicability. Third, that there is a lack of "community" among our undergraduate majors. Again, our plan to hire more faculty should, if implemented,

go a long way toward resolving the first of these concerns. The Department Timetable Committee has already acted on the second concern by asking faculty members to express more long term teaching preferences when timetables are prepared. This will give the Committee information to pass on to students concerning the likelihood that a given course will be offered in the future as well as when the course will be offered. The third issue raised by the Review is very complex. As we examined the transcripts of philosophy majors graduating in 2000, we noted that 60% were double majors. Of that 60%, half had received another degree in one of the social sciences, 25% in one of the humanities and 25% in one of the natural sciences. (This, in itself, we take to be a very good feature of our major.) Further, when we surveyed our majors in an attempt to find out their level of satisfaction with the program, we received very few responses (about 5%). (We received more requests to have their names removed from our E-mail list than responses to the survey!) Finally, when the Review Committee visited campus, only 8 undergraduate majors responded to our invitations to meet with the Committee. Several conclusions might be drawn from this information:

- a) The Philosophy Department has not done enough to foster student interest in developing a sense of community among our undergraduates.
- b) That though there is an interest among undergraduate majors in developing a sense of community, the interest is of secondary importance to the vast majority of them given the time constraints imposed by their other obligations.
- c) That there is no widespread student interest in developing a community of undergraduate scholars in philosophy.

The Department plans to develop some assessment strategies to investigate whether any of these alternatives are true. Further, it should be a focus of our next assessment to see if the Department has made any improvements in this area.

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Procedures for Evaluating the Undergraduate Philosophy Major:

Goals:

A major in philosophy can provide a core or principle around which a student can organize an education in the liberal arts. According the goal of the major in philosophy is (a) to provide a basic and balanced understanding of philosophical questions and the methods philosophers use in attempting to answer them, (b) and some appreciation of the history and the classic discipline, (c) to foster the development of skills essential for doing philosophy and for engaging conceptual issues generally; particularly, logical skills and ability to identify, reconstruct and critically assess arguments, (d) to prepare students for graduate study in philosophy, should they choose to continue to work in the field. Because many of our majors also major in other disciplines, we aim in addition (e) to provide opportunities through course work and independent study to investigate philosophical issues in the natural and social sciences, as well as in the arts and other humanities.

To these ends, we require majors to complete course work in:

- i. The history of philosophy, focusing particularly on the ancient Greek and Modern periods;
- ii. Logic;
- iii. And in a variety of advanced subjects which are designated as satisfying our breadth requirement. Thus we require that majors who are especially interested, say, in the theory of knowledge also do course work in ethics or aesthetics, and that students interested mainly in political philosophy also study metaphysics and the philosophy of science.

Assessment of the Goals:

In order to assess whether the above goals are being met, we completed the following:

(1) In the required courses, 211 (Logic), 430 (Ancient Philosophy) and 432 (Modern Philosophy - 17th and 18th Century Philosophy) professors assessed the majors' grasp of key concepts or skills by embedding questions designed for this purpose in a regular examination or other assignment. These questions aimed to test whether the student had a grasp of some important concept (eg., What is a valid argument form? The concept of "objectivity"? Or Plato's Forms) or some key skill (e.g., the ability to recognize or produce a valid argument, to give a plausible rendition of some important argument, or to produce a criticism of an argument). The professor then evaluated the performance of the majors and submitted a report to the Assistant to the Chair. This was meant to assess whether we are meeting the goals stated in (a), (b), and (c) above.

(2) The Assistant to the Chair, reviewed the transcripts of the graduate majors in 2000 to evaluate whether the advanced courses they took in fact met our goal of "breadth and depth" in the major. That is, are majors taking enough courses from a sufficient variety of areas as well as courses that are sufficiently central to the subject. This is meant to assess goals (a), (d), and (e).

(3) We took into account the recommendations of the recent Review of the Philosophy Department.