# Philosophy Department BA

# Educational Effectiveness

# Assessment Plan

**Version 2.0**

**Adopted by**

**The Philosophy faculty: Spring 2007**

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## Mission Statement

The Department of Philosophy offers a quality baccalaureate program in the rich, living tradition of philosophy. As a liberal arts program, we are dedicated to the development of critical thinking, values education, and a variety of communication abilities in the student. Consistent with its liberal arts mission, the Philosophy Program serves an important part of the mission of the General Education Requirements for all UAA students, and provides specific requirements necessary for the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees in the College of Arts and Sciences. Additionally, Philosophy serves the mission of the Arts and Nursing program by providing required courses for majors in these programs.

## Program Introduction

The Philosophy Department offers several options for students interested in the study of philosophy: (1) a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, with a philosophy track, a law track, or an applied ethics

track; (2) a Certificate of Applied Ethics; (3) a Minor in Philosophy, with a philosophy track or law track.

## Assessment Process Introduction

The Philosophy program is a young program, established in 2002. The Assessment Plan was developed collaboratively in the course of two department meetings in Fall 2002, and approved on September 20, 2002. Assessment goals and outcomes were developed by the Chair in Fall, 2002, based on consideration of goals and outcomes for core courses in philosophy, and expectations for graduating seniors in regard to skills and knowledge levels. The outcomes were reviewed by department faculty as they were developed.

This revision of the Assessment Plan has been developed collaboratively during the Spring of 2007. The revised objectives and outcomes serve to provide a more concise and focused overview of expectations for graduating seniors.

This document defines the expected student learning outcomes for the Philosophy program and outlines a plan for assessing the achievement of the stated outcomes.

The development of the outcomes consisted reviewing the previous assessment plan, discussing course offerings and consulting program outcomes from peer institutions. The faculty met and accepted the outcomes and assessment processes in Spring 2007.

## Program Outcomes

The specific educational outcomes that support the program objectives are to produce graduates who are able to:

1. Identify, comprehend, analyze and evaluate complex philosophical arguments in oral and written discourse.
2. Understand, analyze, interpret and apply major works in the areas of the History of Philosophy, Ethics and contemporary topics.

### Table 1: Association of Assessment Measures to Program Outcomes

| **Outcomes** | Tool Q 1 | Tool Q 2 | Tool Q 3 | Tool Q4 | Tool Q 5 | Tool Q 6 | Tool Q 7 | Tool Q 8 | Tool Q 9 | Tool Q 10 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Identify, comprehend, analyze and evaluate complex philosophical arguments in oral and written discourse. | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Understand, analyze, interpret and apply major works in the areas of the History of Philosophy, Ethics and contemporary topics. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

0 = Measure is not used to measure the associated outcome.

1 = Measure is used to measure the associated outcome.

### Assessment Measures

A description of the measures used in the assessment of the program outcomes and their implementation are summarized in Table 2 below. The measures and their relationships to the program outcomes are listed in Table 1, above.

There is a separate appendix for each measure that shows the measure itself and describes its use and the factors that affect the results.

### Table 2: Program Outcomes Assessment Measures and Administration

| **Measure** | **Description** | **Frequency/ Start Date** | **Collection Method** | **Administered by** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Philosophy Department Assessment Rubric | Evaluation of Student Outcomes through assessing final papers from senior level courses. | Every semester | Faculty Member grading papers completes assessment rubric | Faculty teaching PHIL 490 or PHIL 492 |

### Assessment Implementation & Analysis for Program Improvement

General Implementation Strategy

The outcomes for the philosophy program will be assessed by evaluating papers submitted for senior level courses PHIL 490 (Contemporary Topics in Philosophy) PHIL 492 (Seminar on an Enduring Philosopher). These courses are taken by students who are near completion of the philosophy major. The courses listed provide opportunities to assess the three main areas of philosophical instruction, the history of philosophy, ethics, and contemporary topics. These courses are offered every year. PHIL 490 oscillates between ethics and other topics in philosophy while PHIL 492 often focuses on an enduring philosopher’s ethical theorizing. All of these courses are designed to require a major research project. The assessment tool is designed to be used by the instructor while grading the research project. As the projects and the grading both have to be done, this tool is easy to administer and efficient. Faculty teaching 490 or 492 will turn the assessment results in to the assessment coordinator within a week of submitting final grades.

Method of Data Analysis and Formulation of Recommendations for Program Improvement

The program faculty will meet at least once a year to review the data collected using the assessment measures. This meeting should result in recommendations for program changes that are designed to enhance performance relative to the program’s outcomes. The results of the data collection, an interpretation of the results, and the recommended programmatic changes will be forwarded to the Office of Academic Affairs (in the required format) by June 15th each year. A plan for implementing the recommended changes, including of advertising the changes to all the program’s stakeholders, will also be completed at this meeting.

The proposed programmatic changes may be any action or change in policy that the faculty deems as being necessary to improve performance relative to program outcomes. Recommended changes should also consider workload (faculty, staff, and students), budgetary, facilities, and other relevant constraints. A few examples of changes made by programs at UAA include:

* changes in course content, scheduling, sequencing, prerequisites, delivery methods, etc.
* changes in faculty/staff assignments
* changes in advising methods and requirements
* addition and/or replacement of equipment
* changes to facilities

Modification of the Assessment Plan

The faculty, after reviewing the collected data and the processes used to collect it, may decide to alter the assessment plan. Changes may be made to any component of the plan, including the outcomes, assessment measures, or any other aspect of the plan. The changes will be approved by the faculty of the program. The modified assessment plan will be forwarded to the dean/director’s office and the Office of Academic Affairs.

## Appendix A: Philosophy Department Assessment Rubric

This page is repeated to provide a detailed description for each measure used in the assessment process

Measure Description:

The tool to be used is a form that asks the instructor to rate philosophical research papers on 10 points. The papers are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 low and 5 high). The 10 points are:

1. This paper has a clearly stated thesis.
2. This paper has a sustained argument or sustained development of its thesis.
3. The paper displays awareness of key concepts.
4. This paper provides insightful explanation of complex ideas.
5. This paper displays awareness of important points of scholarship.
6. This paper displays awareness of and key philosophical issues related to its thesis.
7. This paper displays critical thinking skills through the ability to raise philosophical objections.
8. This paper displays critical thinking skills through the evaluation of reasons and objections.
9. This paper displays original and advanced reasoning.
10. The ideas in this paper are cohesive.

Factors that affect the collected data:

Class size: As the courses being used for assessment are small (10-15), differences in the performance of relatively few students can greatly affect the outcome of the assessment.

Professor doing assessment: Different professors will be teaching these courses and may have varying standards for assessing the students’ work within the assessment framework.

How to interpret the data:

The Philosophy department’s outcomes and objectives fall into two categories. The first focuses on skills, e.g. critical thinking, research, and communication, while the second focuses on content, e.g. the history of philosophy, ethics and contemporary topics. The rubric for assessing philosophy papers contains 10 items. The relationship between the 10 items in the assessment tool and the program objectives and outcomes are explained below.

**Outcome 1: Identify, comprehend, analyze, evaluate and construct complex philosophical arguments in oral and written discourse.**

**Assessment tool 1**: This paper has a clearly stated thesis.

**Assessment tool 2**: This paper has a sustained argument or sustained development of its thesis.

**Explanation:** Philosophical discourse inherently involves thesis statement and development. Central philosophical texts are treatises that defend and explain the author’s philosophical position while critiquing competing views. In order for students to be engaged in philosophical discourse, they must be able to clearly delineate their position and provide a rational defense of it. The first two items on the assessment tool measure students’ ability to engage in this aspect of philosophical reasoning.

**Assessment tool 7**: This paper displays critical thinking skills through the ability to raise philosophical objections.

**Assessment tool 8**: This paper displays critical thinking skills through the evaluation of reasons and objections.

**Assessment tool 9:** This paper displays original and advanced reasoning.

**Assessment tool 10:** The ideas in this paper are cohesive.

**Explanation:** The process of raising objections to a position and evaluating the reasons for that position requires that the position is well understood and that the argument for the thesis is adequately reformulated. Since, ability to adequately critique a position is the best indication that the position has been properly understood, in evaluating students’ ability to raise objections and evaluate arguments, items 7-10 of the assessment tool effectively measure students’ ability to identify and comprehend philosophical argumentation. Furthermore, these items explicitly rate the students’ ability to evaluate arguments as explicitly stated in the program outcome. Measure of cohesion of paper in item 10 is another way of determining the students’ ability to reason properly as incohesive papers are most often the result of poor reasoning. Thesis driven philosophical papers, when reasoned correctly, must be cohesive.

**Outcome 1 conclusion:** The above explanations show how six of the items on the assessment tool measure students’ ability to identify, comprehend, analyze, evaluate and construct complex philosophical arguments in oral and written discourse.

**Outcome 2: Understand, analyze, interpret and apply major works in the areas of the history of philosophy, ethics and contemporary topics.**

**Assessment tool 3:** The paper displays awareness of key concepts.

**Assessment tool 4:** This paper provides insightful explanation of complex ideas.

**Explanation:**  Being aware of key concepts and being able to explain complex ideas from philosophical texts in requires an appropriate understanding, interpretation and application of the works under discussion in the history of philosophy, ethics, or various contemporary topics in philosophy. Thus, items 3 and 4 of the assessment tool adequately measure the students’ mastery of the content in the different areas of philosophical discourse.

**Assessment tool 5:** This paper displays awareness of important points of scholarship.

**Assessment tool 6:** This paper displays awareness of and key philosophical issues related to its thesis.

**Explanation**: No philosophical text or position exists in isolation. Proper understanding of the issues and movements in philosophy requires being aware of major scholarly works and related issues. Items 5 and 6 of the assessment tool measure the students ability to understand the context and importance of major works in the various areas of philosophy, which is an important component of understanding those works.

**Assessment tool 7:** This paper displays critical thinking skills through the ability to raise philosophical objections.

**Assessment tool 8:** This paper displays critical thinking skills through the evaluation of reasons and objections.

**Explanation:** As mentioned under outcome 1, ability to properly evaluate and critique philosophical positions requires a proper understanding, interpretation and application of the philosophical work. Thus, items 7 and 8 serve to measure students’ comprehension of content under outcome 2 in addition to measuring their critical skills under outcome 1.

**Outcome 2 conclusion:** The above explanations show how six of the items on the assessment tool measure students’ ability to understand, analyze, interpret and apply major works in the areas of the history of philosophy, ethics and contemporary topics.

**Assessment tool conclusion:** The 10 items of the assessment tool have provided 6 different points for evaluating each of the philosophy department’s program outcomes. This provides an adequate and efficient way of assessing the philosophy department’s ability to achieve its student outcomes.

## Appendix B: Copy of Assessment Measure

Philosophy Department Assessment Rubric

Score each of the following on a scale of 1-5 with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement.

1. This paper has a clearly stated thesis.

1 2 3 4 5

1. This paper has a sustained argument or sustained development of its thesis.

1 2 3 4 5

1. The paper displays awareness of key concepts.

1 2 3 4 5

1. This paper provides insightful explanation of complex ideas.

1 2 3 4 5

1. This paper displays awareness of important points of scholarship.

1 2 3 4 5

1. This paper displays awareness of and key philosophical issues related to its thesis.

1 2 3 4 5

1. This paper displays critical thinking skills through the ability to raise philosophical objections.

1 2 3 4 5

1. This paper displays critical thinking skills through the evaluation of reasons and objections.

1 2 3 4 5

1. This paper displays original and advanced reasoning.

1 2 3 4 5

1. The ideas in this paper are cohesive.

1 2 3 4 5