

Report



Department of Philosophy and Humanities  
Assessment Report for 2004-2006  
Utah Valley State College  
10/1/2003

**I. Degree**

1. B.A and B.S. in Philosophy
2. A.A. and A.S. with an Emphasis in Philosophy
3. Minor in Humanities
4. Minor in Philosophy

**II. Assessment Period Covered**

1. Fall 2004-Spring 2006

**III. Mission Linkage**

1. UVSC Mission Reference: Utah Valley State College is dedicated to providing a broad range of quality academic, vocational, technical, cultural, and social opportunities designed to encourage students in attaining their goals and realizing their talents and potential, personally and professionally. A philosophy degree can help students to attain these goals through training them in the nature of critical and argumentative writing.
2. Academic Master Plan Goals: II.3.7 of the Academic Master plan refers to student outcomes assessment and academic rigor. Philosophical writing demands the highest degree of academic rigor possible.
3. The disciplines of the department engage in the critical study of the intellectual and creative underpinnings of the liberal arts curriculum. Philosophy engages theoretical questions about reality and human experience in the search for truth and understanding. The humanities reflect on and interact with those creative enterprises that make us most human.

**IV. Intended Educational (Student) Outcomes**

1. B.A. and B.S. in Philosophy: The department has decided that work in the original language of the primary text, that while desirable if possible, is not an appropriate objective for undergraduate work in philosophy. Therefore, we have eliminated the "Language" Outcome from our 04-06 plan. The department now considers the student outcomes for the B.A. and B.S. degrees to be identical.
  - i. *History.* Students should develop a broad knowledge of the major figures in the history of Western philosophy as well as the ability to relate thinkers to each other and express reasoned views about the plausibility about their theories.



- iii. The student will be familiar with some of the Western world's philosophical literature such as Plato, Descartes, Kant, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, etc.

#### V. Means of Assessment for Outcome Identified Above

1. B.A and B.S Degree in Philosophy
  - i. *History*. An examination is given to all philosophy majors in conjunction with their Senior Research Capstone to evaluate their accumulated knowledge in the most significant aspects of the *history* outcome identified above. The criteria for success is that 90% of students will receive a score of 85% or higher on this exam. (The grade on this examination has no impact whatsoever on the student's grade in the Capstone course.)
  - ii. *Content*. An examination is given to all philosophy majors in conjunction with their Senior Research Capstone to evaluate their accumulated knowledge in the most significant aspects of the *content* outcome identified above. The criteria for success is that 90% of students will receive a score of 85% or higher on this exam. (The grade on this examination has no impact whatsoever on the student's grade in the Capstone course.)
  - iii. *Method*. A random sample of papers selected from philosophy majors in all upper-division philosophy courses are submitted to an outside reader to evaluate success in the *method* outcome identified above. The criteria for success is that 90% of the students receive an 85% or higher score as determined by our outside evaluator.
2. The department has been unable to effectively assess the Associate Degree in Philosophy due to insufficient data. Our primary means of assessment are the Philosophy Research Capstone and Random Selection of Papers from majors in upper division classes. Associate Degree seekers do not take Capstone, and rarely take upper division classes. The 2006-2008 plan indicates the changes in our means of assessment for the Associate Degree in Philosophy. This new method will enable us to collect sufficient data for associate degree seeking students.
3. The Minor in Humanities has been approved by the Board of Trustees and is awaiting approval of the Board of Regents as a stand-alone minor. We anticipate it will be officially listed in the course catalogue beginning Fall 2007. Therefore we have not yet assessed the Humanities Minor Degree due to the fact that there are no students seeking this degree at the moment. As a stand-alone minor, the department has deemed it critical to assess this degree.

4. The Minor in Philosophy was added as an official UVSC program to the course catalogue in Fall 2005. The department is currently considering whether or not there is value to assessing the minor as a separate degree from the Bachelor's Degree. It may be the case that an effective Bachelor's program would indicate an effective minor. We are currently considering this question. Additionally, as of now there is no official tracking system for minors at UVSC. This problem needs to be rectified before we can assess the degree.

## VI. Summary of Assessment Data

### 1. B.A and B.S Degree in Philosophy

- i. *History.* We administered the departmental examination to all majors (nine students) enrolled in Philosophy Research Capstone in Spring 2005 and Spring 2006. The criteria for success is that 80% of students would receive a score of 70% or above (out of 100%). The average score on the exam was 76%. 67% of students scored above 70% and 33% of students scored below 70%. While the average score was above our 70% goal, we fell 13% short in terms of the number of students achieving this goal. Incorrect answers from the *History* section of the examination accounted for 76% of all incorrect answers on the exam. 60% of students received a score of 70% or above on this section. We fell short of our goal by 20%.
- ii. *Content.* See *History* section above for summary of overall examination data. Incorrect answers from the *Content* section of the examination accounted for 24% of all incorrect answers. 90% of students received a score of 70% or above on this exam, exceeding our goal by 10%.
- iii. *Method.* We had papers written by majors for upper division philosophy classes reviewed by outside evaluators from Brigham Young University (Fall 2004 and Spring 2005) and Wagner College in New York City (Fall 2005 and Spring 2006). The reason for the change in evaluator is that our department feels it is important to have our papers reviewed by an individual not familiar with UVSC in order to avoid any unintentional preconceived notions regarding the expected quality of our students' work. The evaluators reviewed approximately 15 randomly selected papers from each semester. The criteria for success is that 90% of students would receive a score of 85% or higher on their papers (out of 100%). In Fall 2004 the average score was 87%. However, only 71% of students achieved scores above 85%. In Spring 2005 the average score was 80%, with 36% of students achieving scores above 85%. In Fall 2005 the average score was 74.5%, with 30 percent of students achieving scores above 85%. In Spring 2006 the average score was 91%, with 90% of students achieving scores above 85%. For three out of the four semesters, we failed to reach our goal. In Spring 2005 and Fall 2005, we fell

significantly short of our goal.

## VII. Use of Results to Improve Instructional Program

1. We have made significant changes in our Baccalaureate program based upon the results of our assessment data for the student outcome of *Method*. This outcome refers primarily to the ability to write excellent philosophy papers. Our data showed a good deal of deficiency with respect to our students achieving our desired goals. After our last report found similar deficiency in philosophical writing aptitude, we changed Philosophy 1250 from "Logic and Critical Thinking" to "Logical Thinking and Philosophical Writing," and required instructors of this course to spend time teaching the fundamentals of writing superior philosophical papers. After reviewing our assessment data, our department has decided that this is not the appropriate course for such writing instruction. The reports from our external evaluators demonstrated that students still had difficulty in writing philosophical papers on specific topics in the History of Philosophy and in contemporary Continental and Analytic Philosophy. The writing instruction that students received in PHIL 1250 was not effective at preparing them for more discipline-specific work. As a result we are increasing the number of classes that have a writing-focused requirement. PHIL 1250 will remain focused on the basic points of writing philosophical papers, such as thesis construction and defense and the use of clearly and rigorously constructed arguments. We are adding a writing focused requirement to PHIL 2110 (Ancient Philosophy), PHIL 2150 (Early Modern Philosophy), PHIL 4140 (History of Analytic Philosophy) and PHIL 4150 (History of Continental Philosophy). 2110 and 2150 are required of all majors, and majors must take either 4140 or 4150. By emphasizing focused writing instruction in these core classes for the major, the department believes we will effectively supplement writing instruction in 1250. We will facilitate student ability to apply the general aspects of philosophical writing taught in 1250 to the three most general areas of philosophical research: History of Philosophy, Contemporary Analytic Philosophy, and Contemporary Continental Philosophy. This will help prepare students to better achieve success in the department's student outcome of *Method* for the Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy.
2. We are also instituting program changes based upon the results of our majors examination administered through the capstone class. Upon reviewing the results of this exam in conjunction with the organization of the requirements for the major, we found some problems with the Bachelors Degree in Philosophy. Specifically, our "Topics Set I" and "Topics Set II" repeat important material and leave out other components of the discipline all together. Our new requirements will be include three Topics Sets: 1. a "History Set" composed of classes 3000 level or above that focus on the History of Philosophy; 2. a "Topics Set I" composed of classes that focus on Contemporary Analytic Philosophy; 3. a "Topics Set II" composed of classes that focus on Contemporary Continental Philosophy. This will help prepare

students to better achieve success the department's student outcomes of *History* and *Content* for the Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy.

3. Finally, we are instituting some changes to the means of assessment for each outcome.
  - i. For the *History* and *Content* outcome we are expanding our examination and rewriting some of the questions. The department believes that the current 20 question examination is insufficient to identify success in the stated outcomes. We are increasing the examination to a 40 question exam in order to acquire more thorough data. Additionally, we found problems with some of our questions. Several questions meant to gauge proficiency in the *Content* outcome actually tested student proficiency in the *History* outcome. This led to somewhat skewed results. While it is true that 76% of incorrect answers on the exam came from the *History* section, 70% of all questions actually targeted the *History* outcome. We are responding to this by adding a "History Set" to the major requirements (See VII.1 above) and also by rewriting the examination to better accomplish an even distribution of questions between *History* and *Content*.
  - ii. For the *Method* outcome we are changing our method for collecting papers for review. Our data showed a disturbing amount of variability from semester to semester. There was little evidence that our majors were either improving in their writing or getting worse. The department has determined that we have been employing a flawed method for evaluating student work. In the past, we have collected papers from Philosophy majors in upper division classes and randomly selected a specified percentage for external review. However, we realize that we are taking papers from students in their first semester of the major, to students in their final semester, and everywhere in between. Therefore we are not evaluating how well students who have completed the major achieve our desired outcome, but how well any major at any point in the program achieves this outcome. This results in data that is not only extremely inconsistent, but that also cannot reveal how well students who have completed all degree requirements achieve success in the *Method* outcome. For the next assessment cycle (2006-2008) the department is moving to a portfolio system of evaluation where each major will submit three papers that they consider to be their best work. Our external reviewer will evaluate the set of papers from each major and base results on the achievement of individual students who have completed all major requirements.
  - iii. Please see the 2006-2008 Department of Philosophy and Humanities assessment plan for further detail on these changes.

Submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_

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