



Academic Assessment Report: 2023-24

Program - Philosophy (MA)

Program General Information

Mission Statement

The mission of the MA program in philosophy is to provide students with a foundation in key texts and figures in the western philosophical tradition and the plural ways in which that tradition is carried on today; to familiarize them with key contemporary debates within the discipline; and to equip them with a robust range of philosophical approaches with which to address important issues of social, public and global concern.

Source: Philosophy APR Report 2018-19.

College/School

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department/Division

Philosophy

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Demonstrate familiarity with and understanding of the philosophical tradition and how that tradition is carried on or engaged with in the field today

Learning Outcome 2: Students will demonstrate familiarity with and understanding of the philosophical tradition and how that tradition is carried on or engaged with in the field today.

Outcome Status: Active

Show awareness of how philosophical thinking illuminates other areas of discourse.

Learning Outcome 5: Students will show awareness of how philosophical thinking illuminates other areas of discourse.

Outcome Status: Active

Show evidence of the ability to complete and communicate sustained and substantial independent research

LO 7: Students will show evidence of the ability to complete and communicate sustained and substantial independent research on an original topic, suitable as a bridge to doctoral-level work. (Note: This outcome applies only to the thesis option within the MA degree. Students may elect to complete the MA either through coursework alone or through coursework plus a thesis.)

Outcome Status: Active

Show evidence of the ability to conduct philosophical research at an advanced level, and of an understanding of current questions and an appropriate critical engagement with sources.

Learning Outcome 6: Students will show evidence, in written work, of the ability to conduct philosophical research at an advanced level, and of an understanding of current questions and an appropriate critical engagement with sources.

Outcome Status: Active

Show evidence of the capacity to recognize and understand ethical issues and problems involving questions of public policy.

Learning Outcome 4: Students will show evidence of the capacity to recognize and understand ethical issues and problems involving questions of public policy. (Note: This outcome applies only to one concentration within the Philosophy MA: the Ethics and Public Affairs concentration):

Outcome Status: Active

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SL03 - critical, analytical, synthetic thinking

Students will show evidence, in written work, of capability in critical, analytical, and synthetic thinking.

Outcome Status: Active

Assessment Period(s): 2022 - 2023

Is this Student Learning Outcome tied to an external accreditation standard?: No

SL01

Students will produce clear and persuasive written work modeled on the writing of professional philosophers.

Outcome Status: Active

Assessment Period(s): 2023 - 2024

Is this Student Learning Outcome tied to an external accreditation standard?: Yes

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Assessment Method	Findings and Improvements
<p>Description of Assessment Measure: " All papers are to be anonymized. " Each paper will be read and scored independently by two assessors. " After the initial reading and independent scoring, the two assessors will discuss each paper, and compare scores and evaluations. " For each assessor, an overall score will be calculated for each paper based on the average of the three individual scores;</p> <p>æ If differences in the overall score on a given paper are small, the average of the two assessors' scores will be entered as the final overall score. æ If differences are significant, the two assessors will discuss their assessments and attempt to resolve differences, so as (if possible) to come to a closer final overall score. æ Half-points can be used to resolve disagreements but are not to be used in the initial round of scoring. æ The third assessor will act as adjudicator where the first two assessors disagree and cannot come to an agreement through subsequent discussion.</p> <p>Scoring:</p> <p>1 = excellent (exceeds program criteria for this LO) 2 = competent (meets program criteria for this LO) 3 = emerging (goes some way toward meeting criteria but falls short in some key respect) 4 = unsatisfactory (severely deficient with respect to criteria)</p> <p>A paper will be considered to have fulfilled departmental standards for LO 1 if its final overall score is below 2.5.</p> <p>SL01 Criteria attached. Assessment Measure Type: Direct Measure</p>	<p>Findings Date: 05/21/2024 Findings: 1. Each paper was assessed by two members of the Philosophy graduate faculty. There was close agreement in all of the scores.</p> <p>2. All of the papers satisfactorily fulfilled LO1, so 100% of the papers attained MA LO1 at the level of competent or excellent. We met our goal of having 90% of the papers attaining MA LO1. This suggests that the two graduate courses from which we included papers are quite successfully facilitating the kind of high-quality work that we would like to see from our MA students.</p> <p>3. Ten essays, or 83%, exceeded departmental standards for LO1. These essays showed excellent work in all of the following areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> evidence of correctly articulating and grasping a focused and investigable philosophical problem or question, and explaining it accurately in their own words evidence of the student's independent thought, and the ability to write in their distinctive voice the ability to construct a clearly-stated thesis and provide clear support for the thesis in the body of the paper, such that the argument is persuasive the ability to utilize appropriate sources the ability to fulfill the terms of the essay assignment the ability to write in philosophical language with clear prose careful proofreading and citing the ability to conform to standards considered appropriate in the subfield of philosophy to which the paper belongs, with sufficiently detailed arguments <p>The other two essays, a sixth of the total number of papers assessed, fulfilled but did not exceed departmental standards for this learning objective.</p> <p>The results suggest that all (or nearly all) of our students are developing and honing the capabilities that are called for in a graduate seminar and in professional philosophical writing. We have nonetheless identified ways to continue to improve our program.</p> <p>Reporting Period: 2023 - 2024 Conclusion: Target Met Individual(s) Responsible for Assessment: Shannon Fyfe, Rose Cherubin, Andrew Peterson Number of Students Assessed: 12</p>

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Assessment Method	Findings and Improvements
<p>Assessment Measure Status: Active</p> <p>Achievement Target: 90%</p> <p>Supporting Documentation: 2024 Criteria for Assessment (PHIL MA).pdf</p>	<p>Analysis of Results: The papers were overall very good in terms of scope, execution, accuracy, and well-crafted topics. The particular SLO selected, plus the quality of work evident in the papers, made this group of papers fairly straightforward to assess. We would like to highlight several features that we find to have contributed to this high level of achievement, so as to encourage and perhaps suggest guidelines to colleagues in the preparation of their own syllabi, assignment structures, and assignment prompts.</p> <p>a. Every paper met the standard of “excellent” for “essay fulfills the assigned task, and marks were consistently high for “essay demonstrates an understanding of the material.” Many of the papers (including those receiving an overall score of “excellent”) reflect room for improvement in presenting a clear and coherent argument and writing persuasively.</p> <p>b. Clearly, both instructors had our SLOs in mind in developing the assignment structures and assignment prompts; and they applied the SLOs very aptly indeed. They included “scaffolding” assignments as required parts of the development of the final papers. Both also encouraged students to select their own topics based on the texts studied in the class – balancing the goals of understanding the texts and enabling students to focus rigorously on areas of individual interest.</p> <p>c. The “scaffolding” included conferring with the instructor on early phases of the paper (developing research questions, submitting drafts, etc.). We both want to praise the instructors (Dr. Jones and Dr. Nicholson) for their creativity, care, inclusivity, and skill in incorporating the SLO into their courses in a way that most benefits the students (and gives the department valuable information about where students are academically, what they can do, and what they struggle with).</p> <p>d. The students clearly responded with interest and dedication to the prompts – a testimony to the acumen and enthusiasm of the students, and also to the excellence of the instructors. It looks as though perhaps some students were still in the process of transitioning between undergraduate writing (which may not require citation as precisely or as often as graduate and professional writing); but that is part of what the MA program is for: working with them to achieve that transition.</p> <p>However, the two papers that fulfilled but did not exceed departmental standards were weakest on the metric of “fulfills standards for journal articles or chapters, or other relevant kinds of contribution of similar length in its subfield of philosophy.” This suggests that the papers needed more work before they could be sent to a peer-reviewed journal, but is not an indication that the papers were weak as seminar papers.</p> <p>Supporting Documents: 2024 Comments and Analysis (PHIL MA).pdf; 2024 Scoring Sheet (PHIL MA).pdf</p>

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Assessment Method	Findings and Improvements
	<p><u>ACTIONS & IMPROVEMENT PLANS</u></p> <p>Past Improvements: We are continuing to work on revising our course content for PHIL 600, and we still need to incorporate a unit on research resources into PHIL 600, our proseminar. We did successfully supplement PHIL 600 this year with several opportunities for professionalization. We also saw significant scaffolding in both courses we assessed and need to encourage all faculty to implement these practices.</p> <p>Future Improvements: Our students have a range of abilities in terms of citation and professional writing norms. We should incorporate a unit into our proseminar on these topics, and each seminar instructor should spend a bit more time explaining the professional writing norms in their subfields. We have clear evidence that the two instructors whose papers were assessed have already done so, but we would suggest even more direct instruction on these topics.</p> <p>Future Improvements Completed By: 05/24/2025</p> <p>Individual(s) Responsible for Improvement Plan: Andrew Peterson, Lisa Eckenwiler</p> <p>Resources Needed: Department Meeting Time</p>