

2010 Annual Assessment and Program Review Report
David Vander Laan, Philosophy Department

I. Departmental Mission Statement, Student Learning Goals, and Student Learning Outcomes

Mission statement

The mission of the Westmont College Philosophy Department is to provide an education in philosophy from a Christian standpoint that will enable both philosophy students and philosophy professors to cultivate knowledge, skills, and virtues conducive to their development as Christian philosophers. The department serves students who are not philosophy majors by giving them a philosophical introduction to the Christian liberal arts (in our Philosophical Perspectives GE Common Context courses) and by facilitating their ability to reason abstractly (in our GE Common Inquiries Reasoning Abstractly courses). Philosophy majors also receive a comprehensive philosophical education from a Christian point of view that is designed to prepare them for life-long Christian philosophical reflection as either professional or lay philosophers. The department seeks to serve philosophy faculty by encouraging and supporting their on-going philosophical research and teaching.

General Education Student Learning Goals

Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value: Students will be able to state in basic terms the contribution of philosophical reflection to their Christian liberal arts education.

Reasoning Abstractly: Students will demonstrate increased facility with abstract reasoning. The kinds of abstract reasoning skills the department aims to cultivate include the abilities to write and think with precision and clarity, to identify the forms of arguments, to diagnose formal and informal fallacies, to construct strong and sound arguments, to think creatively, and to see the implications both of specific theses and of worldviews.

Integration of Major Discipline: Students will demonstrate (a) the ability to meet disciplinary standards for a good philosophical essay and (b) the ability to integrate philosophical learning with Christian faith and anticipated post-graduation living.

Major Student Learning Goals

Knowledge: Students will acquire knowledge about enduring philosophical questions, major philosophers of the past and present, fundamental philosophical concepts, competing philosophical theories, and standard philosophical

arguments. Students will also gain understanding of the contributions of Christian philosophers to historical and contemporary philosophical dialogue.

Skills: Students will learn how to recognize, construct, understand, and evaluate arguments, to analyze concepts, and to formulate and assess the frameworks of alternative worldviews. Students will also be able to read philosophical material with understanding and to write clear argumentative essays.

Virtues: Students will value the pursuit of wisdom and will exhibit the virtues of charity, humility, carefulness, creativity, and fair-mindedness in their intellectual activity. They will demonstrate an appropriate balance between confident conviction and critical questioning. They will value both the clarity and precision and the significance and profundity of the best philosophical contributions.

General Education Student Learning Outcomes

Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value: Students will be able (a) to recognize and articulate foundational questions of philosophy – especially foundational questions of particular interest to Christians –, (b) to articulate some of the main components of a Christian liberal arts education and the interrelation of philosophy and other areas of academic study in the liberal arts, (c) to articulate the relationship between philosophical commitments and their beliefs, feelings, commitments, and practices as components of a whole life.

Reasoning Abstractly: Students will be able (a) to identify instances of abstract deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving) and can distinguish premises from conclusions (or their analogues), (b) to construct an instance of valid deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving), and (c) to distinguish valid forms of deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving) from invalid and/or fallacious forms of reasoning.

Integrating the Major Discipline: We have not yet formulated specific learning outcomes for this GE goal.

Major Student Learning Outcomes

Knowledge: (a) Students will exhibit knowledge and/or correct understanding of the relevant philosophical positions, concepts, arguments, themes. (b) Students will exhibit knowledge and/or correct understanding of particular philosophers' views or the contents of particular texts (where relevant). (c) Students will exhibit knowledge and/or correct understanding of logical and philosophical methodology necessary for the above (where relevant). (d) Students' claims will

be factually correct (in so far as they make factual claims). (e) Students will cover relevant material the author could reasonably be expected to know.

Skills: (a) Students will be able to distinguish arguments from assertions, explanations, reports, and the like. (b) Students will be able to identify the premises and conclusions of arguments, to recognize a variety of fallacies, and to assess arguments for validity, soundness, strength, and cogency. (c) Students will be able to weigh and explain the significance of historically prominent arguments for and against such views as rationalism, empiricism, theism, naturalism, utilitarianism, egoism, &c. (d) Students will be able to write clear argumentative essays.

Virtues: (a) Students will be able to interpret ideas, positions, and arguments charitably. (b) Students will show an awareness, and proper appreciation, of their own intellectual. (c) Students will read, write and think with due attention to content, context and proper method; and will avoid rushing to snap judgments, superficial interpretations or shoddy work. (d) Students will think about philosophical matters in new and fruitful ways, relative to their experience; they will not be unable or afraid to do so. (e) Students will consider and appropriately weigh the strengths and weaknesses of the various ideas they encounter, even those from philosophers or viewpoints with which they disagree.

II. Data and Interpretation

Student Learning Outcomes

During the 2009-10 academic year the philosophy department collected and discussed data relating to conform to two of the GE goals (Philosophical Reflections and Reasoning Abstractly) and one major program goal (Knowledge).

In the 2010-11 academic year, the department plans to assess its work on the Philosophical Reflections and Reasoning Abstractly goals, in accord with the institutional multi-year assessment plan. It will also work on its Virtue and Skills goals in preparation for the 6-year report next fall.

Data

Data from the spring 2010 classes PHI-006-2 Philosophical Perspectives, PHI-012-1 Critical Reasoning and Logic, and PHI-195-1 Senior Seminar (assessing Philosophical Reflections, Reasoning Abstractly, and Knowledge, respectively) are all available in the Assessment Data folder of the shared drive. Data from the other two spring sections of Philosophical Perspectives and from the evaluated fall courses (four sections of Philosophical Perspectives, Christian Apologetics, and Ethics) are available in hard copy in the respective instructors' offices. Summaries and interpretations of the data in each case are contained in the

instructors' assessment reports to the chair, which are stored in the assessment folder on the chair's computer.

The assessment methods used for the various goals are described below. The results have been interpreted both individually and collectively: individually in each semester's assessment reports to the chair, and collectively in the departmental meeting of Sept. 7, 2010.

Philosophical Reflections:

Assessment of the Philosophical Reflections goal has focused on the outcomes of (1) articulating and thinking critically about foundational questions in philosophy and (2) articulating the contribution of philosophy to the Christian liberal arts.

In the fall section of PHI-006-2 these outcomes were assessed with an essay assignment. The outcome (or outcomes) of articulating and thinking critically about foundational questions in philosophy were assessed separately. 93.8% of students were judged to have done "OK" or better with respect to the first outcome, and 91.1% were judged to have done "OK" or better on the second.

In the fall section of PHI-006-3 outcomes (1) and (2) were assessed by way of questions on three essay exams. 95% of the students did either acceptable or exemplary work relative to the first outcome (58% exemplary and 37% acceptable) and 90% did either acceptable or exemplary work relative to the second (25% exemplary and 65% acceptable).

Two sections of Philosophical Perspectives (PHI-006-1 and PHI-006-4) were taught by adjunct instructors in fall 2009. In both sections, students were evaluated on outcomes (1) and (2) via short (3-5 page) papers. The results in both sections were remarkably similar. In PHI-006-1 34 students scored "acceptable," 4 "exemplary," and none "deficient" with respect to both of the two outcomes. In PHI-006-4 with respect to the first outcome 31 students scored "acceptable," 4 "exemplary," and none "deficient," with respect to the second outcome 33 students scored "acceptable," 2 "exemplary," and none "deficient."

In the spring section of PHI-006-2 outcomes were assessed with an essay assignment. All students were judged to have done acceptable or exemplary work with respect to the first outcome and 87% were judged to have done acceptable or exemplary work with respect to the second.

In the spring section of PHI-006-3 outcomes were assessed via a short paper. All students scored either "acceptable" (41 of 49) or "exemplary" (8 of 49) on the first outcome. Likewise all students scored either "acceptable" (47 of 49) or "exemplary" (2 of 49) on the second outcome.

In the spring section of PHI-006H-1 students were assessed on the first outcome, and all did exemplary work. (As in the fall section of PHI-006-2, the two parts of

this outcome were assessed separately. One student did “acceptable” work on the first part of the outcome.)

Reasoning Abstractly:

In Christian Apologetics students were assigned a 1000-1250-word argumentative essay as a final project. The essay tested students’ argument construction skills. 37% were judged to have a proficiency level of “mastery,” 54% a level of “some proficiency,” and 9% “no/limited proficiency.”

In Critical Reasoning and Logic, students’ skills in argument identification, construction, and evaluation were part of the final exam. One question in particular was selected for assessment purposes. 13 of 23 students rated “deficient” in argument identification, typically because they misidentified the conclusion. The rest scored “exemplary.” In argument construction 13 again scored “deficient,” while 4 scored “acceptable” and 6 “exemplary.” In distinguishing validity and invalidity, 7 scored “deficient,” 4 “acceptable,” and 12 “exemplary.”

Knowledge:

In Ethics this goal was assessed with a 2000-word essay, and in the Senior Seminar it was assessed with a multi-part question on the final exam (approximately one page). In Ethics half of the 44 students scored “good” or “excellent,” and over 80% scored “OK” or better.

In the Senior Seminar the outcome was assessed via a one-page essay question. All 5 of the responding students gave strong answers that displayed their knowledge of both the issues and the views of the particular thinkers named in the question.

Interpretation of the Results

Based on the department’s reflection on the results, the department’s GE and major goals are being met. Nonetheless there are areas in which the department can likely improve, and there are others which it will be keen to keep an eye on. Details follow.

Philosophical Reflections: Overall it seems that the Philosophical Reflections goal is being met, and increasingly so in the sections of Philosophical Perspectives taught by regular faculty (i.e., by those who have taught the course for more than one year). Instructors’ efforts in this area seem to be paying off. In particular, students are learning to think about the topics and questions that the instructors specifically set out to highlight in their courses. There is room for improvement, particularly in adjunct’s sections, though it is to be expected that courses with a high percentage of first-year students (as the adjuncts’ sections apparently were) will not produce results as strong as courses with a greater proportion of sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Reasoning Abstractly: 91% of the students in Christian Apologetics reached a level of “some proficiency” or “mastery.” This exceeded the benchmark of 80%, and was a modest improvement over the previous year’s results. The instructor had used a new text for teaching argument construction and had made efforts to teach the methods involved (as opposed to simply modeling them). These efforts seemed to be paying off, and in their own right seemed to be strong results.

The results in Critical Reasoning and Logic were disappointing and notably weaker than in previous years. Responding to previous years’ assessments, the instruction had included more exercises in writing well-crafted arguments; one might expect these to help with argument identification, but the results do not reflect this. The instruction also included additional accountability for daily assignments, which were checked at the beginning of each class session. Since this tool did not have a noticeable benefit, it seems likely that students would benefit more from devoting the class time to working through examples. The department noted that the class of 2012 has not been as strong as some earlier Westmont classes and wondered whether the sophomores in Critical Reasoning and Logic pulled the average performance down. Results of future years will reveal whether students’ performance this semester was something of a fluke.

Knowledge: The result in Ethics seemed decent but left room for improvement, particularly given that Ethics is an upper-division class. It is worth noting that the class had an usually high enrollment, and that not nearly all students were philosophy majors or minors. The result in the Senior Seminar, in contrast, was clearly encouraging. Together these results suggest that by the time of their graduation, those who major in philosophy understand philosophical ideas, the views of particular philosophers, and the contributions of Christian philosophers to ongoing and historical debates. It is to be expected that Ethics (which will always be taken before the Senior Seminar) shows somewhat weaker results, and this would be expected even if the students were all philosophy majors. Still, it is worth seeing whether the result can be improved in the future.

Major in Philosophy			
Student Learning Goals	Contribution of Philosophy to the Christian Lib. Arts	Reasoning Abstractly	Knowledge
What do the Learning Goals mean?	See the Outcomes section above.	See the Outcomes section above.	See the Outcomes section above.
Where are the Learning Outcomes met?	Introduced: PHI-006	Developed: PHI-012 PHI-101-2 RS-103	Introduced: PHI-006 Developed: PHI-101-2 PHI-104, 135, 175 Matsered: PHI-195
How are they assessed?	Essay exams In-class essays	Logic exams Arg. analysis exercises Philosophical essays	Papers Essay exams
Benchmark	At least 80% excellent or very good	At least 80% excellent or very good	To be determined
Link to the learning standards	Christ. Orientation Critical Thinking	Critical Thinking	Critical Thinking

III. Using the Results and Next Steps

The changes suggested by our interpretation of the above results are primarily changes of course content and pedagogy. Naturally, these vary from case to case.

In Philosophical Perspectives Prof. Taylor plans to develop more resources for the second goal (articulating the relationship between philosophy and the Christian liberal arts).

The chair will continue to communicate with adjunct instructors (since the 2009-10 adjuncts have both moved on) about how to meet the department's GE goals for Philosophical Perspectives.

In Apologetics, Prof. Taylor will continue to use the new instruction methods that appear to have paid off this past year.

In Critical Reasoning & Logic, Prof. Vander Laan will discontinue daily assignment checks at the beginning of the class period, since they were apparently ineffective and took up time that could be devoted to practice and discussion of examples. The department has and will continue to discuss whether students would be better served by splitting the course into two (a Critical Reasoning course and a Formal Logic course) and how such courses might be staffed.

A number of changes have been results of the assessment process to this point, and the department continues to discuss both course-level and program-level changes for the future. For example, in PHI-006-3 both the increased number of tests including questions that assessed the Philosophical Reflections goal and the instructor-written essay on the contribution of philosophy to the Christian liberal arts were changes implemented as a result of earlier assessment activities. The program-level changes the department has been discussing include:

- Whether another faculty member can be hired. This would help broaden the curriculum, would potentially increase the diversity of the department, and would make a badly needed improvement in the faculty/student ratio in GE courses. The department regards this last item as particularly important. Students learn philosophy in large measure through active discussion, and there is very little opportunity for many students to be actively involved in classes of 35-40 students.
- As noted above, the department is considering dividing the Critical Reasoning and Logic class into two. A similar change could be helpful in the cases of both Ancient & Medieval Philosophy and Modern & Contemporary Philosophy. (In all three cases, the conjunctive course titles might serve as clues that these classes consist of a number of distinct pedagogical projects.)

- Better course sequencing (through prerequisites and co-requisites) might avoid some problems and help bring about a better learning environment for our students.
- A number of rarely taught courses are listed in the college catalog, and the department has begun to discuss whether or not these ought to be listed in the future.

IV. Data for Program Review

See appendices below (pp. 10-12) for faculty information charts.

V. Timeline for Completion of the 6-Year Report

Our next 6-year report is due next fall. The department has already collected and discussed data on each of our Common Context and Common Inquiries Student Learning Goals and Major Student Learning Goal of Knowledge. The primary tasks that remain are gathering data on the Skills and Virtues goals; gathering statistical information about the program, its resources, its long-term vision; discussion of those data; and articulating the department's conclusions. Discussion in particular will be a collaborative task among all three regular members of the department, but the primary writing duties will belong to the chair.

A schedule for completing those tasks was included in the chair's application for a Spring 2011 course release. The timeline is included below as an appendix on pp. 13-4.

Faculty Information for Mark Nelson

Year: 2009-10

Date of hire: fall 2005

Sex and Ethnicity: male, Caucasian

Rank: full professor

Tenure status: tenured

Teaching Load: 2-3

	Classes	Number of students	Number of advisees	Other departmental responsibilities	New Preps
Fall	PHI-006 PHI-104	39 10		Erasmus Lecture coordinator	none
Spring	PHI-006 PHI-113 PHI-133	14 7 7		Diversity Representative Animal Control Officer	none
Mayterm	PHI-006	22			
Independent Studies and Internships	none				

Research Update:

“A problem for conservatism,” *Analysis* 6:4.

“We have no positive epistemic duties,” *Mind* 119.

“Y and Z are not off the hook,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35.

Guest Editor of special issue of *Philosophical Papers* on the problem of the criterion

Faculty Information for James Taylor

Year: 2009-10

Date of hire: fall 1994

Sex and Ethnicity: male, Caucasian

Rank: full professor

Tenure status: tenured

Teaching Load: 3-3

	Classes	Number of students	Number of advisees	Other departmental responsibilities	New Preps
Fall	PHI-006 PHI-135 RS-103	40 6 35	14	Phi Sigma Tau coordinator	none
Spring	PHI-006 PHI-102 PHI-170	38 16 10		Organizer of "Animal Ethics" panel in October	none
Mayterm	RS-103	16			
Independent Studies and Internships	none				

Research Update:

"The Lewis-Anscombe Debate," *Sehnsucht*, forthcoming.

"The New Atheists," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

"The New Atheists and Models of God: The Case of Richard Dawkins," in *Models of God and Other Ultimate Realities*, forthcoming.

"Hume's Problem of Induction," in Steven Barbone and Michael Bruce, eds., *Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy*, Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming.

“Can Doubters Know God?” in *Books & Culture*, forthcoming.

Review of Anderson, *The Clarity of God’s Existence* in *The Heythrop Journal*, forthcoming.

Review of Michael Ayers, ed., *Rationalism, Platonism, and God* in *The Philosophical Quarterly*.

Faculty Information for David Vander Laan**Year: 2009-10**

Date of hire: fall 2000

Sex and Ethnicity: male, Caucasian

Rank: full professor

Tenure status: tenured

Teaching Load: 3-3 (reduced in fall for chair duties, in spring for research grant)

	Classes	Number of students	Number of advisees	Other departmental responsibilities	New Preps
Fall	PHI-101 RS-175	9 7	10	Department Chair Library Ordering	none
Spring	PHI-012 PHI-195	27 7			none
Mayterm					
Independent Studies and Internships	none				

Research Update:

“Lewis’s Argument for Possible Worlds,” in Steven Barbone and Michael Bruce, eds., *Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy*, Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming.

“Singular Propositions and Serious Actualism: A Reply to Merricks,” in Kelly James Clark and Michael Rea, eds., *Science, Religion, and Metaphysics: New Essays on the Philosophy of Alvin Plantinga*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

In progress: *Unity and Person: An Essay in Ontology*

Timeline for Completion of the 6-Year Report:

- Since the department's 6-year report is due in September 2011, I here provide a single timeline rather than short- and long-term timelines. What follows is not intended to be an exhaustive list of department meetings, but only of those specifically scheduled for the purpose of assessment activities. If more time is needed for any scheduled item, discussion can always continue at one of the meetings not listed here.
- Schedule of meetings and deadlines
 - 26 Jan 2010 meeting: Discuss student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, virtues) to be assessed in each of Contemporary Moral Problems, Political and Legal Philosophy, Epistemology, and Senior Seminar. Discuss assessment tools for this purpose.
 - 2 Feb 2010 meeting: Begin discussing what should be included in a recent history of the department.
 - 3 Feb 2010 deadline: Begin collecting statistical data on the department (see items A-E in 6-year plan template), including info on graduates.
 - 16 Feb 2010: Continue discussing recent department history: staffing, curriculum, sabbatical scheduling, assessment, &c.
 - 9 Mar 2010 meeting: Discuss faculty profiles and development plans.
 - 30 Mar 2010 deadline: Faculty submit individual profiles to chair.
 - 20 Apr 2010 meeting: Discuss end-of-semester assessment: GE categories (in Philosophical Perspectives, Critical Reasoning and Logic, Modern and Contemporary Philosophy) and student learning outcomes selected in January in Contemporary Moral Problems, Political and Legal Philosophy, Epistemology, and Senior Seminar.
 - 14 May 2010 deadline: Spring semester assessment data in all categories due to chair.
 - 30 June 2010 deadline: Chair drafts recent history of department.
 - 6 Sept 2010 deadline: Chair prepares penultimate draft of annual report.
 - 7 Sept 2010 meeting: Discuss draft of annual report along with assessment results of previous semester, next steps.
 - 14 Sept 2010 meeting: Discuss student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, virtues) to be assessed in each of Metaphysics, Ethics, and Philosophy of Language. This will be the second time each of these classes will be assessed with respect to these outcomes; each will be assessed with respect to a different outcome than it was assessed in fall 2009.
 - 21 Sept 2010 meeting: Begin discussing long-term vision for department.
 - 28 Sept 2010 meeting: Continue discussing long-term vision for department.
 - 12 Oct 2010 deadline: Faculty development profiles due to chair.
 - 19 Oct 2010 meeting: Continue discussing long-term vision for department.
 - 26 Oct 2010 meeting: Discuss relationship of co-curricular activities to student learning outcomes.
 - 2 Nov 2010 meeting: Discuss how department contributes to college mission.
 - 16 Nov 2010 meeting: Discuss how department contributes to GE program.
 - 30 Nov 2010 deadline: Chair drafts report section on the department's contribution to the mission of the college.
 - 7 Dec 2010 meeting: Discuss end-of-semester assessment: GE categories (in Philosophical Perspectives and Ancient and Medieval Philosophy) and student learning outcomes selected in September in Metaphysics, Ethics, and Philosophy of Language.
 - 11 Jan 2011 meeting: Discuss assessment results of previous semester, next steps. Also discuss student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, virtues) to be assessed in each of Contemporary Moral Problems, Epistemology, Philosophical Theology, and Senior Seminar. Some of these will have previously assessed with respect to these outcomes, other will not.
 - 25 Jan 2011 deadline: Update and finalize statistical data on graduates.
 - 8 Feb 2011 meeting: Analyze data collected on graduates and other statistical data.
 - 15 Feb 2011 deadline: Chair drafts data analysis section of 6-year report.
 - 21 Feb deadline: Update comparative data on curriculum at peer institutions (gathered fall 2008).

- 22 Feb 2011 meeting: Discuss financial and program resources in conjunction with APA expectations of the curriculum and comparison with peer institutions.
- 8 Mar 2011 meeting: Discuss conclusions to be reached from all 6-year report data so far collected.
- 15 Mar 2011 deadline: Chair drafts department resources and conclusions sections of 6-year report.
- 29 Mar 2011 deadline: Update faculty profiles as necessary.
- 29 Mar 2011 meeting: Continue 9 Mar discussion.
- 12 Apr 2011 meeting: Discuss end-of-semester assessment: GE categories (in Philosophical Perspectives, Critical Reasoning and Logic, Modern and Contemporary Philosophy) and student learning outcomes selected in January in Contemporary Moral Problems, Epistemology, Philosophical Theology, and Senior Seminar. Final data gathering (apart from end-of-semester assessment), CVs.
- 22 May 2011 deadline: Chair drafts full 6-year report (including executive summary), distributes draft to department.
- 30 May 2011 deadline: Department comments on draft of report.
 - 7 June 2011 deadline: Chair revises draft, completes 6-year report.