PHILOSOPHY
Year 2
(2015-2016)

Outcome

For the 2015-2016 portion of our three-year assessment cycle the Philosophy Department focused upon Program Goal III: *Students will acquire the skills to write and speak effectively about philosophy and other subjects*.

There are three Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) associated with Program Goal III:
(i) *Students will learn to recognize what constitutes relevant material and support for ideas*.
(ii) *Students will learn to organize and to develop material in a well-reasoned manner.*
(iii) *Students will learn to communicate ideas clearly with adequate definition and illustration both in writing and in speech.*

These three SLOs were assessed during the 2015-2016 AY. The details of this assessment are presented below.

Process

The artifacts used to assess PLOs (i) and (ii) were course-required papers written in the Spring 2016 semester by a few class of 2016 Philosophy majors. For PLO (i) papers were drawn from PHIL 413 *The End of Philosophy*. For PLO (ii) papers were drawn from PHIL 316 *American Perspectives on Health Care Ethics*.

The artifact used to assess PLO (iii) was an oral examination taken in the Fall 2015 semester by a few class of 2016 Philosophy majors. This oral examination was a requirement of PHIL 412 *Art and Metaphysics*.

The tools used to assess these instruments were standard rubrics for the assignments in question (clarity of expression, coherence of argumentation, attentiveness to evidence, thoroughness of analysis, consistency and plausibility of claims, and philosophical rigor).

Findings

A. For Program Goal III, SLO (i): *Students will learn to recognize what constitutes relevant material and support for ideas.*

The instruments used to assess Goal III, SLO (i) were papers written by each of six Philosophy majors from the class of 2016. Each of these students was enrolled in PHIL 413

The End of Philosophy during the Spring 2016 semester and wrote these papers as part of the requirements of that course.

One student used lyrics from a popular 20th century American ballad to highlight the foundational assumptions behind Heidegger's notion of profound boredom, revealing the student's discernment concerning the grounds relevant in Heidegger's account of boredom as a 'fundamental disposition' and demonstrating the student's rhetorical sense of how best to convey this to his reader:

> "Within profound boredom, no entities stand out. This is what Heidegger calls "the Nothing." It's not that nothing is happening, but rather that the Nothing happens. And, it is within this negation of things that we begin to feel possibility and encounter Dasein, the clearing in which being is presented…This is why we use restlessness to characterize profound boredom…With all of this in mind, I could not help but to think of Otis Redding's song, "Sittin' on the Dock of a Bay". In the song, two particular lyrics stuck out to me that seemed to be reflective of Heidegger's notion of *Langeweile* or boredom: "Looks like nothing's gonna change. Everything still remains the same." and "Sittin' here resting my bones and this loneliness won't leave me alone." The first line is very reflective of early onset profound boredom. It's the realization of our indifference to all things and entities. The second line is very indicative of a feeling of *Langeweile*, or a 'long while', and the restlessness associated with it. The singer is in a state of indifference but something (that he calls loneliness) won't leave him alone. Something seems to continue to nag at him and bother him, which during the experience of the nothing is indicative of the calling. Overall, I find this song helpful to my understanding of Heidegger's notion of boredom. Further, it acts as a demonstration of the call to exist as a human being which 'won't leave me alone'."

Another student explained the meaning of Heidegger's assertion concerning 'the end of philosophy'. In the following comment she shows a clear awareness of the most relevant support for this sort of formulation:

> "In his essay "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking", Heidegger defines philosophy, in its current form, as metaphysics. Metaphysics seeks to understand the Being of beings, in other words the cause which explains their existence. However, each elucidated cause points to a "thing", something "ontic" rather than something "ontological"… In summary, metaphysics has, for too long, been couched in a way of thinking that settled for ontic things as the answer to ontological questions. The result of this was Nietzsche's proclamation of the "Death of God", an end to philosophy in the traditional sense and in an eschatological sense. Heidegger reintroduces the possibility of God, the resurrection of God, by pointing out the historical shunning of "absence" or "concealment" when considering being. [This way of understanding the 'end' of philosophy] invokes a sense of calling to ponder the meaning of being, which…allows one to perceive the conflictual union of revealing and concealing inherent in being."

A student with a double major in Biology and Philosophy wrote the following measured and analytically precise description of boredom in Heidegger, reflecting an impressive sense of what grounds and connects several aspects of this concept:

> "Profound boredom is an absence of the happening of things, insofar as things lose their this-ness and poetic element. There is a refusal of things, but a refusal in the sense that things refuse to be important and thus, profound boredom is characterized by a catastrophic indifference. All things appear inessential in the register of importance and the world becomes drained of care. In profound boredom, it is not that things or entities do not exist, but rather that they do not standout. Profound boredom, and thus this refusal of things, is a mood, a disposition, which is done unto me and I do not bring it on myself. This refusal of things is revelatory in that it is a disposition which discloses an absence of disposition for being, for beings hold me but do not engage me. This refusal and absence is so complete in profound boredom that it reveals the possibility of caring and things having importance. Profound boredom is effective as a dead end, but not in a way in which the road ends; rather, it serves as a point of divergence like how a fork in the road forces one to choose to go one way or the other. In this way, refusal is an announcement: it is the no that does yes! In the huge *no* of feeling the absence of meaning and significance, we become aware of the *yes* of the possibility of importance and caring. Profound boredom does not claim that the opposite of the refusal must be the case in reality but rather, points to the possibility that it may be the case. Just as the silence or refusal of noise between musical notes allows us to understand and experience the notes of a song, this complete refusal of things allows us to understand the possibility of care."

A fourth student used an original and creative musical analogy in order to express what is 'disclosive' in *Langeweile* or profound boredom for Heidegger. The example is complex and is explicated here clearly enough to elicit what amounts to the relevant support for it in Heidegger's conception:

> "The first chord of *Tristan*, known simply as "the Tristan chord", remains the most famous single chord in the history of music. It contains within itself not one but two dissonances, thus creating within the listener a double desire, organizing in its intensity, for resolution" (Bryan Magee, Wagner and Philosophy p. 208). The Tristan chord, which consists generally of a bass note and its fourth, sixth, and ninth, creates musical discord; this absence of harmony creates a longing for it in its listeners. The Tristan chord is an absence that creates; its discord reveals the possibility of musical harmony. Heidegger's concept of boredom operates in a similar fashion; "it is an emptiness precisely where, as this person in each case, we want nothing from the particular beings in the contingent situations as these very beings" (Heidegger, 137). To shed light on profound boredom—"it is boring for one"—it shall be analyzed in the light of Dasein, with the Tristan chord serving as analogy."

The fifth student, a double major in Applied Mathematics and Philosophy, wrote about the relation of 'boredom' in Heidegger and 'time'. He correctly perceived the deliberate irony in

Heidegger's conception, namely, that only time in one of its particular dimensions can liberate us from time in its function as a kind of entrapment (as revealed in the mood of boredom):

> "What does it take to get us to accept our Dasein out of this state of profound boredom? According to Heidegger, "the temporal entrancement can be ruptured only through time itself, through that which is of the proper essence of time and which, following Kierkegaard, we call the *moment* of time" (151). In other words, it is only a meaningful 'moment of time', where we can see that our being does matter, that can get us out of the temporal horizon, and into seeing time as linear again… Profound boredom's emptiness calls us to the possibility, through its conspicuous absence, that Dasein is possible. Since Dasein is possible, there is possibly a moment of time – or calling – that gets us to see that there is a past, present and future, in relation to that significant moment. To say it simply, profound boredom calls us to the possibility that we can possibly be called to accept our Dasein, and therefore to exist as human beings."

The last of these six students, also with a double major in Biology and Philosophy, wrote in an essay on Josef Pieper's book *Leisure the Basis of Culture* about her transformative experience of philosophy's traditional founding element, namely, the pathos of wonder:

> "We have so little control over what philosophy does to us, but I do think we have a say over whether or not we let it do something to us at all…In a society of total work – a society where leisure and wonder seem to have no business, where does all our work really get us? Our restless exertion and ceaseless movement forward is all about doing, but in *only* doing, we deny a part of ourselves. Underneath the hyperactivity, people are still not at one with themselves, because part of human cognition is work, but we are capable of so much more than what can be measured objectively…So what effect does seeing the concealment of the world have on a person? Is there an effect (besides feeling like you're going insane) that seeing the limitations of your own thoughts have? I think the eschaton of my experience with wonder is to shape the kind of person I now aspire to be. My wonder has shown me that I can be more than doing, that I can be more than my work, and that I can rediscover the world around me every day."

Findings:
Each of these six passages displays its student author's educated awareness of a thinker's (or the student's own) background assumption or assumptions, and of what – in light of those assumptions – constitutes supporting evidence for claims made on their basis. This, in turn, points to genuine success, at the program level, in our leading students to "recognize what constitutes relevant material and support for ideas."

B. For Program Goal III, SLO (ii): *Students will learn to organize and to develop material in a well-reasoned manner.*

The instruments used to assess Goal III, SLO (ii) were two position papers written by each of four Philosophy majors from the class of 2016. Each of these students was enrolled in PHIL 316 *American Perspectives on Health Care Ethics* during the Spring 2016 semester and wrote these papers as part of the requirements of that course.

Paper 1 asked the students to articulate and defend philosophically their position on an apparent tension between the belief that Advanced Directives are binding on health care professionals and proxies, and the belief that permanently unconscious human beings are not members of the moral community.

Paper 2 asked the students to articulate and defend philosophically their position on whether a community's choice to prohibit Physician-Assisted Suicide as a way for that community to reject, publicly and collectively, the claim that some members' lives are no longer worth living would be a morally unjustified limitation on individual autonomy.

Each of these two assignments required students to stake out as their own one of a number of possible moral positions, and to defend that position in a reason-based, systematic way. Students were expected to present a carefully structured argument with identifiable premises and a conclusion. The following tables indicate some of the strengths and weaknesses of these papers.

Student	Paper 1 strengths	Paper 1 weaknesses
A	- Thesis clearly stated. - Constructed a careful and systematic *argumentum ad absurdum*. - Well-reasoned, coherent case in favor of thesis.	- Asserted, rather than explained, that a particular position is problematic. - Failed to distinguish between intrinsic and instrumental value. - Failed to distinguish between essential and non-essential characteristics of a thing X.
B	- Thesis clearly stated. - Offered a complex argument in a limited space. - Employed an argument regarding "kinds of things" in support of the thesis. - Employed alternative and incompatible philosophical anthropologies, and then argued for one being more plausible than the other.	- Could more clearly connect a section of the paper dealing with on continuity of identity over time with the overall argument of the paper.
C	- Thesis clearly stated.	- Relied at times on assertions

	- A clearly structured and sustained argument in favor of the thesis.	of important points rather than offering a case in favor of them.
D	- Thesis clearly stated. - Argument strategy is clearly laid out and executed.	- Language somewhat imprecise at times. - The claim at the heart of the argument could be more thoroughly defended given its role.

Student	Paper 2 strengths	Paper 2 weaknesses
A	- Thesis clearly stated. - Employed the principle of universalization to construct a forceful *argumentum ad absurdum*. - Identified a problematic conclusion entailed by the position he is challenging. - Made the case that the principles of *dignity* and *autonomy* better support his, rather than his opponent's, position.	- Some key points could have been more thoroughly defended.
B	- Thesis clearly stated. - Offered a sophisticated argument that Physician Assisted Suicide requires that one endorse the position that each human life has merely contingent and instrumental value, then critiqued that position on the value of the human individual. - Offered a careful argument against the position that autonomy the supreme value that the community must never limit.	- Some key points are asserted rather than defended (e.g. "PAS is not a treatment for any illness.")
C	- Thesis clearly stated. - Offered a careful and systematic argument grounded on the didactic value of civil law. - Offered an argument that the principle often used to support permissive PAS laws	- Some key claims could have been more thoroughly defended.

	(*autonomy*) actually undermines the case for such laws.	
D	- Thesis clearly stated. - Manifested a clear grasp of the difference between considering human beings to have *intrinsic* vs. *instrumental* value, and then offered a well-constructed case for the former.	- Moved a little too quickly, failing to adequately establish certain important points before moving on in her argument.

Findings:

One recurring deficiency, albeit a small one that did not significantly undermine the rational force of the arguments presented in these eight papers, had to do with the foundations of the arguments offered. Identifying which points in an argument deserve the most attention (i.e. elaborate articulation and careful defense) and which points one may simply stipulate for the sake of the debate is an important skill in such a writing exercise. While the students generally did this rather well, there were places where doing this better would have strengthened these already strong papers.

This set of eight papers indicates rather clearly that these four graduating Philosophy majors had learned "to organize and to develop material in a well-reasoned manner." Each paper offered an easy-to-follow yet philosophically sophisticated argument in support of a clearly stated moral position in the field of Health Care ethics. The authors' nuanced employment of relevant moral principles, their use of evidence, and their systematic movement from these principles and evidence to their conclusion indicate clearly that they possess the suite of skills indicated in Program Goal III, SLO (ii).

C. For Program Goal III, SLO (iii): *Students will learn to communicate ideas clearly with adequate definition and illustration both in writing and in speech.*

The instrument used to assess Goal III, SLO (iii) was an oral examination taken by six Philosophy majors from the class of 2016. Each of these majors was enrolled in PHIL 412J *Art and Metaphysics* during the Fall 2015 semester and took this oral exam as one requirement of that course.

PHIL 412J *Art and Metaphysics* aptly applies to Goal III, SLO (iii), as a mid-term oral examination is given that asks students to demonstrate *eloquentia perfecta* in speech through mastery of textual exposition, critical reading, and critical thinking. Students must identify, articulate, and critique the various philosophical understandings of modern science and technology and their metaphysical foundations in the western philosophical tradition, as well as understand the various implications "postmodern" interpretations of philosophy and of science

have upon their own philosophical foundations in the context of the SJLA program and Jesuit education as a whole. In other words, students are asked to understand the cultural and theoretical repercussions of the so-called "Death of God" (as a cultural phenomenon) and the rise of postmodernism and scientific reductionism. The oral examination consists of a list of questions students are to prepare ahead of time, as well as an "on the spot" textual exposition of passages from Nietzsche and Heidegger.

Student oral examinations presented with many common strengths. The Philosophy majors in the course performed quite well.

> • One major, a recipient of the Philosophy departmental award, spoke with high enthusiasm and clear understanding of each author's logic and line of argumentation. Her textual exposition was creative and innovative in that she related much of the content concerning environmental philosophy to her major of Environmentalism and Peace and Justice studies--in particular, Heidegger's understanding of Nietzsche's will to power as the possible underlying metaphysics of Global technology.

> • Two other majors, working in a group, (one a recipient of the English departmental award) also showed mastery of the material, as they were able to relate the content of to their previous SJLA courses, in particular Marxist alienation via capitalist consumerism, as discussed in their "Philosophy of Conscience" course taught by Dr. David Black. A clear strength of this course's content, as well as the students in the course, was that the course content (intentionally) seemed to lend itself to interdisciplinary thinking.

> • Another major (a Philosophy-Neuroscience double-major and winner of the Neuroscience departmental award) was able to creatively draw connections between her tutorial on Asian philosophy and culture and the attempted non-linear thinking of Heidegger and the so called "overcoming of metaphysics."

> • The top two oral examinations (both Philosophy majors) displayed mastery of the material, creative thinking, and the ability to draw connections to other academic disciplines, in particular mathematics and physics. These two students focused upon the question of the ontological status of intelligibility as it relates to mathematical objects, as well as the need for ontological objectively to be presupposed by both mathematicians and physicists.

Findings:
Again, clear strengths of this course's content and method of examination include the enabling of interdisciplinary thinking. Moreover, the oral examination method, coupled with textual exposition, forced students to master not only textual expositions and the difficult ideas involved therein, but also improvisational thinking. Students as a whole also proved successful in coping with and thinking through the anxiety that often accompanies public speaking, as well as testing. Finally, the course content as a whole–science, technology, and philosophy–proved especially relevant to the SJLA students in general, as the majority of these students tend to have first majors in the sciences.

Student weaknesses in the exam centered largely on anxiety due to oral communication. However, as said above, this proved only to be a minor, and an expected weakness in student performance, as nearly every student was ably to cope with the stress of the examination method. One student comment found the course content easy to communicate with other SJLA philosophy majors, but almost impossible to communicate with the average student with a major in the sciences. While seemingly a minor problem, and the complaint of only one student, this weakness or "complaint" is nevertheless taken seriously, particularly due to course outcomes that aim specifically at students' integration of philosophy, science, and the modern scientific world-view. In the fall 2016, when the course is retaught, more time will be included for discussing this possibility of incommunicability between philosophical language and scientific language, with hopes of finding a common language between the two.

Where applicable, outline the steps you will take to make improvements to the program based on the results of assessment activities identified in #3.

The pattern of student performance presented in this report is encouraging and indicates that no program-wide adjustments are called for with respect to Program Goal II and its three associated SLOs. As always, individual instructors will look to make changes to particular assignments as they engage in the ongoing process of refining each of their individual courses.

Are there any new resources needed to make program improvements? If so, please include the resources and provide justification for each in the Budget section of the Annual Report.

No new resources are needed to make program improvements related to Program Goal III.

Submitted June 29, 2016
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