

Program Review 2005: Philosophy

I. Program Description and Scope

The philosophy program at Ohlone College is, by large, a traditional philosophy and religious studies program that offers students exposure to new ideas, cultures, value systems, and the means to critique and analyze them. The two courses History of Ancient and History of Modern philosophy, for example, offers students the opportunity to question basic truths as what reality is, how we experience the world, and struggle with enduring questions such as “Do we have free will?” and “What is virtue?” In taking philosophy courses, students broaden their knowledge culturally, as well as intellectually. The courses on religion offer valuable insight on students’ own religious beliefs, as well as other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism, all of which lay the ground work for the diversity of cultures and values that exist today. Through an understanding of different cultures and values, genuine acceptance and tolerance can take place within the campus, and the larger community. Practical Reasoning and Logic offer the chance for students to rigorously examine their own ability to reason and develop their critical thinking skills. The primary tool of philosophers is argumentation and reasoning, and being such, students will develop their reading comprehension¹ and argumentation skills. The ethics course offers a framework for evaluating ethical issues that society at large and individual students may face in their personal and professional lives.

The philosophy program overall, currently has a dual vision, unified by a common singular value. Firstly, it envisions to create well-educated persons, with the understanding that being well-educated does not mean a person who has accumulated an impressive amount of facts, but rather one who is curious and engaged with the world around him or her, and seeks to broaden his or her understanding through proper reasoning. The traditional philosophy courses such as History of Ancient Philosophy, History of Modern Philosophy, Practical Reasoning, Logic, and Ethics share this vision. The second vision is to broaden the cultural experience of students through an examination of one of the most culture-defining institutions in society, religion. Such examinations will lead to a broadening of cultural understanding, cultural growth, and foster an appreciation for the differences that cultures have. The courses Understanding the Old Testament, Understanding the New Testament, Introduction to Asian Religions, Introduction to Western Religions, and Introduction to Islam share in this vision. The singular value that unites all of the courses is that of inquiry. The ability to question the beliefs, values, and assumptions of each individual, of societies, and of cultures, and holding them to a rigorous standard of reason allows for the growth of the individual academically, socially, spiritually, and ethically.

Recently the philosophy program has experienced a major change in staffing. In December of 2004, the full-time philosophy instructor, Dennis Roby retired from Ohlone College, serving since 1971, and full-time in philosophy since 1992. In the Spring 2005, Wayne Yuen was hired as the full-time philosophy instructor.

¹ The Lexile Framework for Reading uses Rene Descartes’ Meditation as its benchmark for 1700L, the most difficult material to read. Descartes’ Meditation is standard reading for Phil 102 Modern Philosophy. See the website <http://www.lexile.com/pdf/lexilemap.pdf> for more information.

The philosophy program has been and continues to be part of the foundation of a liberal arts education, as well as a means to make students well educated persons. It currently offers 10 different courses in the fields of Philosophy and Religious studies, all of which are transferable for CSU and UC credit. The philosophy program offers courses that meets the General Education requirements for Plan A (Area III, Area IV, and Area VI), Plan B (Area A3 and Area C2), and Plan C (Area 3B). The current offerings are:

101 Ancient Philosophy	109A Introduction to the Old Testament
102 Modern Philosophy	109B Introduction to the New Testament
104 Logic	110 Introduction to Asian Religions
106 Ethics	112 Introduction to Western Religions
107 Practical Reasoning	114 Introduction to Islam

These offerings are comparable to similar programs at neighboring community colleges. Evergreen Valley College offers 6 courses, San Jose City offers 7 courses, Chabot college offers 9 plus two 1-unit special projects courses, Diablo Valley College offers 8 courses, West Valley College offers 12 plus several one unit courses, and Mission College has 10. Among quarter-system schools, Los Positas offers 5 courses, De Anza College offers 18 courses, and Foothill College offers 11 plus several one-unit special project courses.

II. Program's relationship with the College's mission and goals.

The underlying feature of philosophy as a discipline is that it questions and attempts to justify basic assumptions and values that people hold. Being such, the philosophy program is perfectly situated to directly examine and instill the core values of Ohlone College. Under Ohlone's Mission statement, Life-Long Learning is emphasized, which philosophy can help contribute to by providing students the critical thinking skills that will help them achieve autonomous learning. Philosophy the discipline is notorious for never giving a definitive answer to questions. By engaging a student's curiosity about the fundamentals assumptions and values of the world, the philosophy program can encourage a habit of life-long learning as well. The stated Core values Ohlone seeks to promote are: diversity, inclusiveness, respect, integrity, and stewardship for environmental resources, all of which can be examined philosophically through course offerings such as ethics, and courses concerning religion.

III. Student Learning Outcomes

Because there are no certificates or degrees offered by the Philosophy program at this time, evaluation of student learning outcomes for each particular course, which have been revised this year, would be most profitable. However, generalized student learning outcomes, that are consistent with most of the courses in the program, can be made for the entire program. Students who complete courses in the Philosophy program will be able to:

- 1) Define key terms of the philosophical vocabulary relevant to the course.
- 2) Distinguish different areas of philosophy and philosophical methodology.
- 3) Understand some of the diverse assumptions and values that shape our experiences and/or attitudes of the world.
- 4) Read at a comprehension level that is appropriate for a college student.
- 5) Write an argumentative essay.

- 6) Have developed critical thinking skills necessary to critically assess real world issues, and the various perspectives on them.
- 7) Evaluate good and bad arguments.
- 8) Understand and communicate abstract ideas.

IV. Assessing Student success in achievement of SLOs.

Since most of the SLOs listed above require specific data collection to determine whether or not they have been reached, and many of the SLOs are new, there is little data that can be analyzed to determine whether or not the current program has been successful in achieving these results. However, SLOs # 1-5 could be indirectly evaluated by examining the successful completion rate of the program (see below for analysis). The remaining SLOs could be evaluated by examining instructors' evaluation of argumentative papers written in courses. Unfortunately, there is no such data at this time to evaluate. The course outlines of the philosophy program will be updated so that students who receive a passing grade in the course must have demonstrated acceptable progress towards achieving the program SLOs. This would allow future program reviews to utilize course success rates as a reasonable measure for several SLOs at once. The only separate data that would be needed, student scores on argumentative papers, could easily be collected by instructors.

V. Assessment of Program through review of the teaching learning process.

In the first table in the appendix, we can see the relative enrollments for the 04-05 academic year for each course, and their retention and success rate percentage over the year. In the 02-03 and 03-04 academic year, we saw a retention rate of 89.27 (fall only). If we were to look at only the fall retention rate of the 04-05 academic year, the percentage drops to 81.0%. Historically the retention rates of the program have been higher. In the 01-02 program review, the program's 3 year average retention rate was 84.8 (fall only). The program's current 3 year average retention rate now is 86.5%, a slight improvement.

I can offer no solid explanation for the drop in retention rates of Fall '04. The overall retention rate for the Fall and Spring of the 04-05 academic year was 81%, which is a significant drop from the average of 86.5. Summer course retention rates have not been factored into these numbers yet, and traditionally summer courses have higher retention rates than the normal school year. But individually, the retention rates are slightly lower than the average. Whether a student completes a course is open to a whole series of factors including personal emergencies, being overwhelmed by their course workload or a change in employment responsibilities. That said, I believe the most common reason for not retaining students is poor early performance within the class. This is a difficult issue to address since philosophy as a whole is a difficult subject for students. However, the drop in retention rates in the Fall couldn't be simply because the discipline is difficult. The discipline itself did not suddenly become more difficult in the Fall of '04. Speculating, Dennis Roby retired in December of that year, so it is possible that his impending retirement affected the retention rates of his classes.

I am pleased to note that the successful completion rate of courses is up overall. In the 02-03 academic year the program had a success rate of 64.8. In the 03-04 the success rate went

to 65.7. If the retention rate is factored in, this means that 82.2% of the students who were retained successfully completed their courses in the 04-05 academic year. The raw numbers break down to approximately 730 students who were retained, and of those 600 passed their course successfully.

In the second table of the Appendix, there are two points that merit explanation. The first is the significant change in the FTEF-Full Time Faculty in the Fall of 02-03. This was due to Dennis Roby, the Full-time Faculty member then, taking sabbatical. The increase in the FTEF-Adjunct was to adjust for the Roby's sabbatical.

The second point that merits explanation is the drop in the WSCH/FTEF of Fall 2004. Typically the philosophy program has a WSCH/FTEF of above 600. But in the Fall of 2004 it dips down to 584. Student enrollment was primarily the cause of this dip. This is a trend that is college wide, but even with the college wide trend, a drop of enrollment of 12% is a serious concern. It is possible that this drop is due in part to Dennis Roby's retirement, and his recent sabbatical creating an inconsistent program environment. Some of the drop is probably related to the college wide drop in enrollment, and the recent raise in tuition fees. The philosophy program may have been hit particularly hard because of these two causes. Regardless of the cause, it is a serious problem that needs to be corrected immediately. Making the philosophy program more attractive to students is absolutely necessary.

VI. Assessment of Program Improvement Since Previous Program Review

Current course SLOs have been re-written and updated this year. The new policy of program SLOs have been implemented as well. There have been no significant program revisions since the last review in 01-02.

Examining this year's enrollment data, does yield some noteworthy patterns. Phil 101 is a highly enrolled class, yet, Phil 102's enrollment is much lower. I believe that this because students perceive the Phil 101 course to be an introductory course, whereas the course outline clearly puts this course beyond an introductory level. When students take Phil 101, and find that the material is much more difficult than they had expected, they are disinclined to take Phil 102. I am recommending two changes: Change the course number of both Phil 101 and Phil 102 to higher numbers, to reflect the difficulty of the courses, and create a new course: Introduction to philosophy, a proper philosophy survey course. The Introduction course would serve to prepare students for the difficulty of both Phil 101 and Phil 102, and help them understand that the courses do not need to be taken sequentially. This will hopefully raise Phil 102's enrollment.

Similar reasoning would justify renumbering the formal logic course, currently Phil 104, to a number higher than practical reasoning, which is Phil 107. Since the course is more difficult, the numbering should attempt to reflect this. I also am considering changing the name of the course from Practical Reasoning to Critical Thinking, which more closely matches the names of similar courses among the community college system, and the CSU general education requirement A3.

Ideas for two new ethics courses have also been discussed by various members of the administration. The first is a bioethics course, focusing on medical and scientific ethical issues

such as stem cell research and human experimentation, which potentially could be a required course for the Biotechnology certificate. The other class being considered is a business ethics course that could deal with issues such as the ethics of various economic systems, capitalism being noteworthy, corporate responsibility, discrimination in the workplace, and the global economic issues such as world poverty and environmental responsibility. This course could possibly be made a required course for the Accounting certificate and Marketing and Distribution certificate, both offered by the business department, or it could be made a requirement for the A.A. degrees that the business department offers. Currently, San Jose State University's Business program requires their students to take a business ethics course. Both of these courses have a huge potential value to the philosophy program, and would be consistent with the college's overall goal of providing more cross-curricular learning. Either course could be taught wholly within the philosophy program, or team taught in conjunction with the appropriate program.

Re-evaluating the ethics course, Phil 106, so that it becomes more of an applied ethics course, rather than a course on pure ethical theory is also being considered. Since the 1970s the focus of philosophy has been less on theoretical ethical theories, but rather on concrete moral problems that society faces today. I believe that the Ohlone student will benefit more from examining pressing moral issues of today such as abortion, euthanasia, affirmative action, than if they spend the semester examining various definitions and justifications for "right" and "wrong." The dominant theoretical models in contemporary moral philosophy today are Utilitarianism, Kantianism, Virtue theory, and Ethics of Care. Popular moral conceptions in the general populace include ethical relativism, and Nihilism. These moral theories can easily be examined in conjunction with an examination of modern day moral issues.

Lastly, the idea of a philosophy and popular culture class, which the new full-time faculty has been championing for, also is being considered. The course would integrate popular culture mediums such as film, music, and television, and connect them with philosophers and their writings. There have been many such courses around the country built around particular movies such as *The Matrix*, and *The Passion of the Christ*. The benefit of offering a course such as this would be higher enrollments to the philosophy program. However, I have reservations about the utility of the course to the student. Depending upon how the course is written, it may not be transferable to many 4 year universities, and if it is transferable, it would at most count as an introduction to philosophy course. If we create both a separate introduction to philosophy course and a popular culture and philosophy course, we would be offering students two courses that count for the same transferable credit. So a student taking both courses would have only 3 units transferable, or 3 elective units that would not count towards any particular G.E. requirement at the 4 year institutions. But these are only initial worries and speculation. No serious inquiry has been made yet about these concerns.

Appendix

Table 1

2004-05 Academic year totals			
Course	Enrollment	Retention Rate	Success Rate
PHIL 101	242	79.2%	63.3%
PHIL 102	91	70.0%	40.0%
PHIL 104	55	90.9%	81.8%
PHIL 106	337	88.6%	75.4%
PHIL 107	83	79.5%	78.3%
PHIL 109A	18	73.7%	73.7%
PHIL 109B			
PHIL 110	25	68.0%	48.0%
PHIL 112	25	80.0%	68.0%
PHIL 114	13	100.0%	61.5%
PHIL 202*	1	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL	890	82.1%	67.5%

Table 2

Ohlone College
Instructional Basic Program/Discipline Review Data
2005-06

Philosophy	Data Source	2002-03				2003-04				2004-05				
		Fall	Spr	Sum	Ann	Fall	Spr	Sum	Ann	Fall	Spr	Sum	Ann	
Enrollment Data:														
Courses Offered	Datatel	6	10	2	11	8	11	2	13	8	6	2	10	
Sections Offered	Datatel	9	11	2	22	14	12	2	28	10	8	2	20	
Enrollments (dup., credit only)	XWFR	375	478	138	991	421	426	103	950	351	381	101	833	
FTES (credit only)	Data Mart	39	49	14	102	43	44	11	98	36	39	DTNA ⁷		
Full Time Faculty ¹	Instr. Office					1					1			
FTEF - Full Time ²	Datatel	0.2	1.1	0		1	1	0		1	0	0		
FTEF - Adjunct	Datatel	1.6	0.7	0.4		1	0.9	0.4		0.8	1.7	0.4		
WSCH/FTEF (credit only)	XWFR	625	826	1065		632	685	795		584	687	779		
Student Success Data:														
Percent Retention ³	Data Mart	83	80	96		82	83	89		81	81	92		
Percent Success ⁴	Data Mart	68	61	92		64	67	85		61	68	88		

Notes:

* Phil 202 is an independent study course.

1. Full Time Faculty = the number of filled positions whose primary assignment is in this department (includes temporary full time faculty)
2. "FTEF - Full Time" includes overload assignments and fulltime faculty from other departments teaching in this discipline
3. Retention = Percent of students from census who remain through end of term
4. Success = Percent of students from census who remain through end of term and receive grade of A, B, C, or Credit
7. DTNA = Datamart Term Not Available, information should be posted by Oct 1