

Program Review 2008: 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. 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.

This program review will represent the first time that the philosophy program has been headed by Wayne Yuen, who was hired in the spring of 2005. The previous philosophy program review, in 2005, was done by Wayne, but was representative of the program before his hire.

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 11 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:

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

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 5, Diablo Valley College offers 8 courses, West Valley College offers 13, and Mission College has 10. Among quarter-system schools, Las Positas offers 7 courses, De Anza College offers 19 courses, and Foothill College offers 15 plus several 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 as a 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 would be the most successful way of evaluating the program's successes. 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. Since argumentative papers are required for all philosophy courses, passing the course can be an indicator of completion of SLOs 6-8. Definitively evaluating the completion of SLOs 6-8 however is difficult in that they are skills that are typically unquantifiable, but rather demonstrated in discussions and essays.

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

In the appendix of this program review, you can find the Instructional basic program/discipline review data. Enrollments have remained steady, although they have dropped since Prof. Yuen's hiring. There was an average of 924 student enrollments between the years of 2002-2005. The average enrollments from 2005-2008 have been 720 students. There were more sections offered between 02-05 and 05-08, so average enrollments may have dropped simply because fewer sections have been offered. When the average student enrollment is divided by the number of sections offered in the two time ranges we get approximately 13.2 students in 02-05 and 12 students in 05-08. So the drop in student enrollment averages about 1.2 students per section offered. Additionally, in the spring of 08, two students were enrolled in an independent study course with Prof. Yuen, which will significantly affect the average enrollment per section.

More concerning is the drop in retention and success rates. In the 05 program review, the average retention rate was 86.5%. From 05-08 the average retention rate dropped to 82.1%. Success rates also dropped from the 05 program review, 72.6% to the current average success rate from 05-08, 69.5%. Examining only summer success rates, there is a significant difference, a success rate of 90.3% from 05-08. I believe that this is a good indicator of a change in standards in the philosophy department since the hiring of Prof. Yuen. Prof. Joe Steinke typically teaches the summer intersession courses, and he may have significantly different standards for his courses than Prof. Yuen, resulting in an overall drop in the retention and success rates for the philosophy department overall

during the fall and spring semesters, where he teaches 5 courses, and Professor Steinke typically teaching 2. Simply put, the philosophy program is a more difficult program than it used to be, because students are being held to a higher standard.

WSCH/FTEF ratios have remained consistent, averaging in 689 in 05-08, compared to 742 in the 05 program review. The small drop in the ratio from 04-06 semesters may be attributed to the retirement of Prof. Dennis Roby, and the subsequent hiring of Prof. Yuen, and the student population's unease of taking courses from an unfamiliar professor. 05-06, the WSCH/FTEF ratio has steadily grown, reaching its highest in the fall of 07, excluding summer sessions.

VI. Assessment of Program Improvement Since Previous Program Review

Since the previous program review, the philosophy program has offered a new course, phil 100, introduction to philosophy, and has begun offering the course at Kennedy High School as a recruitment tool for raising interest in philosophy and courses at Ohlone. Anecdotally, I know of at least 3 students who took the phil 100 course at Kennedy that went on to take more philosophy courses at Ohlone. I could not obtain specific enrollment data to determine if the intro course has helped or evened out enrollments in the two history courses, phil 101 ancient philosophy and phil 102 modern philosophy.

In the previous program review, I suggested changing the title and course number of phil 107 practical reasoning. This proved to be more difficult than I initially believed. In addition to essentially recreating the course with a new number and title, recruiting students to take the new course may be slightly confusing, and ensuring the course retains its transferability to the UC and CSU systems would be another hurdle. In short, the costs to students and the rather negligible benefit to the program would not outweigh the risks that changing the course title and number would entail.

Ideas for new courses are continuing to be considered. The Bioethics courses is still in development, and the scope of the course has been expanded to potentially include medical ethics as well, since most textbooks available treat both bioethics and medical ethics as one and the same. Another course that is currently being considered is a Latin American philosophy course. This course is being considered because of a recent part-time hire of Jesus Ramirez, who has had a hand in developing a similar course at SJSU.

Appendix:

Ohlone College
Instructional Basic Program/Discipline Review Data
2007-08

Philosophy	Data Source	2005-06				2006-07				2007-08					
		Summer	Fall	Spring	Annual	Summer	Fall	Spring	Annual	Summer	Fall	Spring	Annual		
		Enrollment Data:													
Courses Offered	Datatel	2	6	9	10	1	6	8	9	1	7	9	10		
Sections Offered	Datatel	2	8	11	21	1	8	10	19	1	8	11	20		
Enrollments (duplic., credit only)	XWFR	101	282	352	735	65	283	362	710	51	307	357	715		
FTES (credit only)	Data Mart	10	29	36	75	7	29	37	73	5	32	38	75		
Full Time Faculty ¹	Instr. Office														
FTEF - Full Time ²	Datatel	0.0	1.0	1.0		0.0	1.0	1.0		0.0	1.0	1.0			
FTEF - Adjunct	Datatel	0.4	0.6	1.0		0.2	0.6	1.0		0.2	0.6	1.0			
WSCH/FTEF (credit only)	XWFR	779	531	532		1070	592	614		840	641	606			
Student Success Data:															
Retention Rate ³	Data Mart	93%	73%	78%		97%	78%	74%		96%	74%	76%			
Success Rate ⁴	Data Mart	89%	59%	64%		88%	58%	56%		94%	58%	60%			
Degrees Awarded	Data Mart					NA					NA				
Certificates of Achievement ⁵	Data Mart					NA					NA				
Certificates of Completion ⁶	Data Mart					NA					NA				