Philosophy Department Strategic Assessment Plan
Illinois Wesleyan University
(Revised Fall 2013)

I. STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

What are the goals of our curriculum and other components of the major in terms of student learning? How did our department arrive at these goals? How are these goals shared with relevant constituencies?

The Philosophy Department has identified the following student learning goals for the major. These goals were selected by departmental consensus, by reflection upon the aims of philosophical education as expressed in our own philosophical training, our department curriculum, and by reflecting on goal statements articulated by philosophy departments at other universities and by the preeminent professional organization in our discipline, the American Philosophical Association. These goals are stated in the department's entry in the university catalog, on our department web page, and in the syllabi for many of our courses. They are also clearly articulated and addressed in the rubrics we use in the implementation of our direct assessment instrument (see below).

1. *Proficiency Goals:* The Philosophy Department is committed to ensuring that students acquire the skills in critical analysis they need to succeed at IWU and afterwards. We expect students to learn to read texts closely, to outline step by step the arguments the texts contain, to express those arguments clearly and concisely in their own words, to critically evaluate them, and to generate arguments in response to them.

2. *Knowledge Goals:* We are also committed to ensuring that our students develop an understanding of perennial philosophical problems, (e.g., the nature of reality, the conditions for knowledge, and the source of value), the scope and significance of these problems, and their treatment by historical philosophers (e.g., Plato, Descartes, Hume) as well as by contemporary philosophers (e.g., Stroud, Nagel, Korsgaard).

II. METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

What measures have we developed for assessing student academic outcomes in the major?

We assess student learning, specifically students' achievement of our departmental learning goals, using the following *direct* and *indirect* assessment measures.

1. *Exit Surveys (Indirect Measure).* We ask each graduating senior major to complete an exit survey (see below). We send graduating seniors a copy of the survey one month before graduation. The seniors return their completed surveys when they meet with us to review their records and have us sign their senior check cards. This instrument serves as an indirect measure of the students' achievement of both proficiency and knowledge goals, since it asks students to reflect upon whether and in what ways their philosophy coursework has helped them achieve these goals.

2. *Portfolios (Direct Measure).* We ask each graduating senior major to submit a portfolio of the following five papers: one from their first philosophy course, one from either the History of Ancient Philosophy (Phil 280) or from the History of Modern Philosophy (Phil 281), one paper in which they examine a philosophical problem from a contemporary perspective, one from their last 300-level class, and the paper they regard as their best. At the beginning of the academic

year, each major receives information describing the portfolio system and urging them to date and collect clean copies (that don't include instructors comments) of the five specified papers. Flyers announcing the portfolio system are posted around the department and distributed in our classes. Students are periodically reminded—especially during fall and spring advising—that they are required to keep copies of their written work for the portfolios.

Since we are quite familiar with the quality of our students' work, both from their performances in our classes and from frequent informal discussions, we engage an outside evaluator to provide us with a more objective assessment of their written work than we would otherwise be able to provide. We ask the outside evaluator to read the portfolios (five papers each) of three graduating seniors and to evaluate whether those papers demonstrate that the students have achieved our departmental learning goals. More specifically, each year we ask the evaluator to focus on either our proficiency goals or our knowledge goals, and we provide the evaluator with the rubrics we have designed to focus his or own evaluation on those particular goals. (See below for our Proficiency Goals Rubric.)

The people we use as outside evaluators are full-time, tenure-track philosophy faculty—preferably tenured—at four-year institutions. They are people whose departments and whose individual research we are familiar with and hold in high regard.

III. FEEDBACK

What are our feedback mechanisms? How do we share and discuss the outcomes of the implementation of our assessment measures? How do we factor what we have learned back into our curriculum?

1. *Exit Surveys.* Seniors return their completed surveys when they meet with us to review their records and have us sign their senior check cards. We then turn these surveys over to our Office Coodinator, and that person compiles all of the responses into a single document and uploads that document to the departmental Dropbox folder, thereby making it accessible to all of the tenure-track faculty in the department.

   Since students often mention courses they would have liked to have been able to take that were not available, we discuss the responses to the exit surveys in department meetings in the context of planning which courses to offer in upcoming years and in the course of planning for future hiring of new faculty. Students also often stress the value of the frequent, variable kinds of writing assignments we give in our courses and the value of learning to read complex, argumentative texts. Individual faculty in the department consider these kinds of trends in the exit surveys as they write new course syllabi and revise existing syllabi. Finally, students also discuss the number and variety of Independent Studies, Research Honors, Study Aboard, and Internship experiences they have pursued during their time at IWU. We review and discuss this information as we think about how to improve our advising of individual students as well as our advising of the Society of *Philosophical* Inquiry and Exploration (SPIE), i.e., the club for majors, minors, and other students interested in philosophy.

2. **Portfolios.** The outside evaluator returns his or her evaluation of the portfolios to the departmental assessment liaison. That person then uploads the document to the departmental Dropbox folder, making it assessable to all of the tenure-track faculty in the department.

   We conducted our first external evaluation of portfolios in the spring of 2013, and we are currently (in the fall of 2013) in the early stages of developing good procedures for reviewing and using the information we learn from those evaluations. We plan to update this part of our Strategic Assessment Plan as we develop these procedures.

Philosophy Department
Exit Questionnaire 2012-2013

<u>**Please check one**</u>**:**   **Major_____**
                          Minor_____

1.   **At what point in your career did you decide to become a philosophy major/minor?**

2.   **What led you to make that decision? What is it about philosophy that particularly appeals to you?**

3.   **What did the philosophy department do to help you achieve the following goals? Please be as specific as possible:**
     (a)   Reading, thinking, and writing more critically.

     (b)   Developing an understanding and appreciation of various traditional and philosophical problems (e.g., what is the nature of reality, the conditions for knowledge, and the source of value?).

(c)   Developing an understanding and appreciation of classical (i.e., Ancient and Modern) philosophers' treatments of these problems.

(d)   Developing an understanding and appreciation of these problems from a contemporary perspective.

4.   What did the department fail to do to help you achieve the above goals? Please be as specific as possible.

5.   Describe a situation in which you were given a particularly exciting/meaningful assignment in one of your major/minor courses. Can you explain what made it so?

6.   If possible, describe a particularly exciting/meaningful class—something that really changed the way you thought about yourself or the world (or your major/minor). Can you explain what made it so?

7.   What would you like to see added to the curriculum, if we had unlimited time and resources?

8. **What do you think is the most important thing you learned from your time at IWU studying philosophy?**

9. **What do you regard as your most significant achievements in your Philosophy major or minor? Why?**

10. **Did you do any independent studies while at IWU? If so, please describe them.**

11. **Did you do Research Honors at IWU. If so, please describe it.**

12. **Did you study abroad? If so, where? What courses did you take? Describe the experience's contribution to your education.**

13. **Did you do an Internship while at IWU? If yes, describe.**

14. **Did you have any other major or minors? If so, which ones?**

Biannual Rubric for Proficiency Goals

I. Reading & Exegesis

1. The author accurately attributes to the philosopher claims that are found in the text, with appropriate references and citation.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

   Comments?

2. The author adequately explains or defines any philosophical terms from the text that are crucial for the project of the paper.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

   Comments?

3. The author accurately and clearly identifies the steps of an argument, either in narrative or in outline form (i.e., numbered steps set apart from the text of the paper).

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

   Comments?

4. The author's presentation of the argument is comprehensive: it includes all the claims from the text that are necessary to develop the argument.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

   Comments?

5. The author's presentation of the argument is economical: it does not contain textual material irrelevant to the argument.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

   Comments?

6. The author presents a charitable understanding of the philosophical text: s/he construes the text's claims in the most favorable way available, avoids creating straw men, etc.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

Comments?

7. The author's discussion of the text is illuminating: the author's paper would likely help a confused reader of the original text attain a better understanding of it.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

Comments?

II. Critical Evaluation & Argumentation

8. The author clearly identifies an evaluative thesis to discuss: e.g., an objection to one of the text's patterns of inference, a challenge to one of the text's premises, or a further consequence or application of the text's arguments or claims.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

Comments?

9. The author's evaluative thesis is a plausible, relevant, and non-trivial response to the argument the author is considering.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

Comments?

10. The author develops this evaluative thesis critically: s/he offers reasons and argumentation in support of the thesis, s/he addresses obvious objections to it, etc.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

Comments?

11. The author's development of this thesis is clear and cogent.

1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Neutral	Agree Slightly	Strongly Agree	Not applicable

Comments?