Preface

Our department has gone through several staffing transitions since our last assessment in 2005. Dr. McHugh was on maternity leave Fall of 2005 and then sabbatical 2006-2007. Dr. Martinez-Saenz has been serving at Assistant Provost for First-Year Experience since 2007, teaching only one course for our department since 2007. We had adjunct replacements for Dr. McHugh during her leave and sabbatical and a full-time visiting line, Dr. Gilson, to replace Dr. Martinez-Saenz line. Though this is normal with any department, in a department of three faculty members these changes are felt more strongly. In spite of these we have been able to effectively continue our implementation of our new curriculum, which began in 2005 with our last review.

Learning Goals

Three groups of students take philosophy courses: (1) students taking a philosophy course to fulfill a general education requirement or as an elective, (2) students fulfilling the requirements for a minor in philosophy, and (3) students fulfilling the requirements for a major in philosophy. Typically, none of these students has taken a philosophy course before, since philosophy is not typically offered in high schools. Thus almost all our students take a course at the 100- or 200-level as their first exposure to the discipline of philosophy. The Department has two distinct sets of goals for these three groups of students, the first set having different levels, with each higher level assuming the lower level(s) and the second set applying only to minors and majors, at two different levels.

A. Philosophy Curriculum Learning Goals in Critical Thinking/Critical Theory

For students in group #1 (general education and one- or two-course elective students), we set the basic and intermediate critical thinking goals listed below – since they will be enrolled in 100- and/or 200-level courses. How well they realize these goals depends in part on how many courses they take and also on the pre-college and early college preparation in critical thinking they may have already had before enrolling in our courses. Simply put, students develop these skills by engaging in reasoned arguments with others about beliefs or values they hold, in and out of a classroom setting, concerning politics, or who is the better performer on stage or on the field, or whether they should get to stay out late or have to clean their room...any number of things. Put another way, students who come to us from homes in which their parents or other primary care-givers engaged them in reasoned discussion of matters of importance to them and/or from high schools in which were encouraged and fostered not only memorization for texts but also independent analysis, synthesis, and reflection are students who begin well prepared for work in philosophy. Others have a great deal of difficulty in philosophy, and we have both groups of students in every philosophy course we teach at the 100- and 200-level.

For students in group #2, we set the advanced critical thinking and basic critical theory goals, and for those in group #3, we set the [intermediate] critical theory goals.
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<th><strong>Basic critical thinking:</strong></th>
<th>100-level</th>
<th>200-level</th>
<th>300-level</th>
<th>400-level</th>
<th>Beyond undergrad.</th>
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<tr>
<td>· Recognize the importance of vocabulary, seeking definitions to unknown words.</td>
<td>These skills developed at the 100-level</td>
<td>These skills further developed at the 200-level</td>
<td>These skills presupposed at the 300-level</td>
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<td>· Identify an author’s or speaker’s thesis or main point.</td>
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<td>· Distinguish between descriptions, explanations, and arguments (reasoning supporting inferences).</td>
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<td>· Recognize and identify the main argument offered as supporting an author’s or speaker’s thesis, distinguishing between common forms in inductive and deductive reasoning.</td>
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<td>· Distinguish between conclusions and premises within arguments, identifying both intermediate and final conclusions, and stating explicitly those premises which an author or speaker has left unstated.</td>
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<td>· Distinguish positive argument from objections and rebuttals or refutations.</td>
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<th><strong>Intermediate critical thinking:</strong></th>
<th>100-level</th>
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<th>Beyond undergrad.</th>
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<td>· Paraphrase or restate, in one’s own words and without plagiarizing, the argument and/or perspective of an author or speaker.</td>
<td>These skills introduced at the 100-level</td>
<td>These skills developed at the 200-level</td>
<td>These skills presupposed at the 300-level</td>
<td>These skills presupposed at the 400-level</td>
<td>These skills presupposed beyond the undergraduate level</td>
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<td>· Distinguish between well-reasoned and poorly-reasoned arguments, identifying relevant and irrelevant evidence, evaluating the strength of evidence, and recognizing common reasoning fallacies.</td>
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<td>· Adjudicate between the arguments and counterarguments of two (or more) who are in explicit disagreement, identifying the insights of each as well as the weakness in their reasoning.</td>
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<td>· Articulate critical assessments of the arguments of others clearly and succinctly.</td>
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<td>· Articulate counterarguments, offering objections and rebuttals or refutations of the arguments of others.</td>
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<td>· Begin to be able to recognize an author’s or speaker’s unstated, underlying assumptions and worldview.</td>
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<td>· Begin to be able to extend the line of reasoning employed by an author or speaker in directions not taken by the author or speaker.</td>
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<td>· Begin to be able to situate an author’s or speaker’s ideas and reasoning within a specific historical and social context.</td>
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**Advanced critical thinking / basic critical theory:**
- Recognize and identify an author’s or speaker’s unstated, underlying assumptions and worldview.
- Extend the line of reasoning employed by an author or speaker in her or his own terms, elaborating and showing where the argument might lead in directions not explicitly taken by the author or speaker.
- Recognize and identify how an author’s or speaker’s ideas and reasoning are situated within a specific historical and social context, identifying the features of those ideas and reasoning which arise in response to the author’s or speaker’s circumstances, e.g., in dialogue with other recent authors or speakers or in response to recent political and/or social challenges.
- Recognize and identify an author’s or speaker’s motivation for thinking and reasoning as she or he does, identifying relevant features of her or his biography.
- Deal competently with arguments the scope of which extends over an entire book-length text.
- Articulate critiques of an author’s or speaker’s argument in a formal style, suitable for professional philosophical discourse.

These skills developed at the 300-level

These skills further developed at the 400-level

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<th>The skills presupposed beyond the undergraduate level</th>
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**Critical theory:**
- Articulate the rationality of an author’s or speaker’s insights and viewpoint, identifying not only idiosyncratic and culturally relative features of his or her thinking but also those features upon which we may wisely and usefully draw.
- Deal proficiently with arguments the scope of which extends over an entire book-length text.

These skills developed at the 400-level

These skills further developed beyond the undergraduate level

**Advanced Critical Theory:**
- Articulate an integrative understanding of the historical and social nature of thinking and reasoning, indicating how it is possible to be rational – seeking truth, endeavoring to understand reality, and pursuing right action and good living – even though epistemically and politically located, thoroughly situated both culturally and personally.

These skills developed beyond the undergraduate level

| The skills presupposed beyond the undergraduate level |

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B. Philosophy Curriculum Learning Goals in Historical/Professional Philosophy

Since students may only gain entry into the history of Western philosophy sequence and other 300-level courses after taking at least one 100- or 200-level course, this set of goals will typically apply only to students either minoring or majoring in philosophy.

Group #2 – minoring in philosophy
Students will develop an understanding of traditions in Western philosophy from ancient Greece to the nineteenth century. They will begin to develop a critical perspective on the historical and socially situated nature of these traditions in Western philosophy through exposure to other cultural and philosophical frameworks. They will begin to gain facility in analyzing and producing work in two genres of professional academic philosophy: the book review and the conference paper (20 minutes reading time, presented at end-of-semester colloquia).

Group #3 – majoring in philosophy
Students will develop an understanding of traditions in Western philosophy from ancient Greece to the present. They will gain a critical perspective on the historical and socially situated nature of these traditions in Western philosophy through exposure to other cultural and philosophical frameworks. They will gain facility in analyzing and producing work in three genres of professional academic philosophy: the book review, the conference paper (20 minutes reading time), and the journal article (the senior thesis, approximately 5,000-10,000 words, prepared, presented in summary at department colloquia, and defended in the context of the Senior Seminar). Students will become philosophers, seeing philosophy not only as an academic activity but also as a guide to life.

Assessment Methods

The accomplishment of the critical thinking/critical theory learning goals will be assessed through course work and end-of-course assessments, with items in assessment instruments designed to monitor students’ growing abilities at each level. The accomplishment of these goals is also indirectly assessed (for philosophy majors, group #3) as part of the “senior assessment” conducted by the department consisting of a comprehensive examination at end-of-program (including a senior thesis, an oral examination on a recent book in philosophy, and a written exam on texts, thinkers, and movements covered in the Historical/Professional Philosophy sequence).

Our primary means of assessing students’ academic progress are the following:
1. Socratic question and answer in class
2. Open discussion with students in class
3. Conferences with students in faculty offices about their work in our courses
4. Shorts tests and/or reaction papers in 100 and 200-level courses
5. Final exams in 100- and 200-level courses
6. IDEA end-of-course teaching evaluation instrument
7. Short and intermediate length papers in 200- and 300-level courses
8. Book reviews in 300-level courses
9. Conference papers in 300- and 400-level courses, presented in Department colloquia
10. Journal article in Senior Seminar, defended in the context of the Seminar
11. Oral exam on a recent (20th/21st century) book in philosophy as part of “senior assessment”
12. Written exam on history of Western philosophy as part of “senior assessment” (This item was part of our curriculum revision proposal, but we have not yet begun to administer this exam, as the curriculum is only now fully in place for new majors.)

Summary of Findings:
Our modes of assessment are integrated and build upon each other, as was intended by our curricular structure. Furthermore, they facilitate assessing our work as faculty at the same time we assess student learning. For example, Socratic questioning opens the door to open discussion within the classroom, which then builds upon speaking skills. This in the end helps our majors in their Oral Senior Comp, and allows us to assess them and our teaching throughout this trajectory.

Our assessment indicates that our curriculum is meeting our critical thinking/critical theory learning goals as well as contributing to general education goals of speaking and writing. They also show that we have a high quality faculty committed to student learning inside and outside the classroom.

1. Socratic question and answer in class: Students respond well to this type of questioning in our classes. Our course evaluations report consistently that students learn from the open question environment in the classroom and that this style forces them to think farther than they would on their own. Furthermore, this questioning helps to point to the important gaps in student learning that we need to close.

2. Open discussion with students in class: By and large our class have a substantial amount of open discussion. This occurs at the general education level and at the upper-division level. Peer reviews of our teaching, student comments, and IDEA evaluations show that overall our department is effective in this area, as does the high quality of oral communication through paper presentations and oral comps from our majors.

3. Conferences with students in faculty offices about their work in our courses: We continue to conference regularly with students about their work at the lower and upper divisions. This one-on-one engagement not only helps further the work of excellent students, it also improves the work of students that are having difficulty. Our evaluations indicate that students find themselves served well by our open door policy and our required conferences.

4. Shorts tests and/or reaction papers in 100 and 200-level courses and final exams in 100- and 200-level courses: These modes of assessment show that some students are excelling with the material and that some are not. In general these modes of assessment indicate that students that do the course work, i.e., do the assigned reading and writing, do well in our courses. Those that do not usually do not succeed in our courses. As a department we have found that we need to have weekly and daily assignments that keep the students reading and engaging the material or many of them just won’t do it.

5. IDEA end-of-course teaching evaluation instrument: Evaluations, in general, have our courses in the “similar,” “higher,” and “much higher” categories. We do very well meeting our course objectives and well in the excellent teacher and excellent course categories.

6. Writing in upper-divisions courses: The written work that our students do in our upper-division courses indicate that overall our writing curriculum is benefitting them. Through the sequence of writing book reviews, 12-15 page papers in our history courses and upper-division topics courses, and finally a substantially longer paper in our senior seminar, indicate that many of our students are developing some of the skills that they
need to produce high quality research papers at their level. On the other hand, several of them going into their Senior Thesis project are still not as adept as they should be at formulating a thesis statement, researching it, and defending it. There seems to be a gap in student facility at this level, one that we need to fill.

7. Senior Comp: For the past 5 years students have taken an Oral Comp on John Dewey’s *Quest for Certainty*. We prepare the students for the comp in our senior seminar, though they independently read the text. The senior comps indicate that our students are making the connections between what they learn in the history of philosophy sequence and the critical thinking and critical theory skills they learn throughout our curriculum. This comp has been a highly effective mode of assessing student learning and curricular effectiveness.

8. Most of our students go on to do service work and/or graduate school in philosophy or another discipline. Our high success rate in these areas indicates that our students are obtaining the philosophical skills to succeed in graduate school and to succeed as responsible, thoughtful global citizens.

Changes to be Implemented

Though we will not make major changes to our curriculum, we are working to develop more independent, focused research in our upper-division courses. Ironically, this happens through a bit more hand holding and detailed structure in the writing aspects of the courses. For example, in our Senior Seminar and in some of our upper-division courses we are using a book called *The Clockwork Muse* that teaches students to formulate a topic, thesis, and finally a paper in a very structured manner. Students who take this book seriously see substantial improvements in their ability to write a critically argued paper.

Resource Needs

This may be addressed in the near future.

Plan for Continued Assessment

The members of the Department will continue to use assessment methods #1-#6 above to assess the progress of individual students in group #1 (taking general education courses and/or elective courses).

The Department will begin systematically to monitor the progress (in retrospect when necessary) of each students in group #2 (minoring in philosophy) and group #3 (majoring in philosophy). We will develop a matrix for keeping track of student performance as they move through the requirements for their minor or major program.

We have also discussed establishing an informal peer review process in our department. We have yet to implement this partly because we have had many staffing transitions. This should be a source of further discussion.