

Philosophy Department Strategic Assessment Plan May 2025

1. Student Learning Goals

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.

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., Nagel, Nussbaum, Singer).

2. Methods of Assessment

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

Exit Surveys (indirect measure): We ask each graduating senior philosophy major and minor to complete an exit survey. Students submit anonymized completed surveys to our Office Coordinator, who uploads the surveys into a department Dropbox folder, thereby making them accessible to the faculty in the department. 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.

The exit survey asks the following questions:

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) The department helped me to read, think, and write more critically.

- (b) The department helped me develop an understanding and appreciation of various traditional philosophical problems (e.g., what is the nature of reality, the conditions for knowledge, and the source of value?).
 - (c) The department helped me develop an understanding and appreciation of classical (i.e., Ancient and Early Modern) philosophers' treatments of these problems.
 - (d) The department helped me develop 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 philosophy curriculum, given 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 an Independent Study while at IWU? If yes, please describe it.
 11. Did you do Research Honors at IWU? If yes, please describe your project.
 12. Did you study abroad while at IWU? 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, please describe.
 14. Did you have any other major or minors? If so, which ones?

Portfolios (direct measure): We ask each graduating senior philosophy major and minor to submit a portfolio of the following five papers: one from their first philosophy course, one from either *Ancient Philosophy* or from *Modern Philosophy*, 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. Students submit anonymized portfolios to our Office Coordinator, who uploads the portfolios into a department Dropbox folder, thereby making them accessible to faculty in the department.

Each year, the assessment liaison will randomly select eight papers from portfolios of recent graduates in order to assess whether those papers demonstrate that our students have achieved our department learning goals. Papers will be selected across portfolios and across the various types of paper that compose the portfolio, aside from the paper from a first philosophy course. The department has developed three rubrics for this task: two that assess proficiency goals and one that assesses knowledge goals. Department members will apply the rubric to all eight of the selected papers and share their scores with the assessment liaison, who will report to the department on the findings. The rubrics ask assessors to characterize their level of agreement with the following statements about the papers under consideration.

Proficiency in Understanding Arguments rubric

1. The author accurately attributes to the philosopher claims that are found in the text, with appropriate references.
2. The author adequately explains or defines any philosophical terms from the text that are crucial for the project.
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).
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.
5. The author's presentation of the argument is economical: it does not contain textual material irrelevant to the argument.
6. The author presents a charitable understanding of the philosophical text: they construe the text's claims in the most favorable way available, avoid creating straw men, etc.
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.

Proficiency in Evaluating and Producing Arguments rubric

1. 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.
2. The author's evaluative thesis is a plausible, relevant, and non-trivial response to the argument the author is considering.
3. The author develops this evaluative thesis critically: they offer reasons and argumentation in support of the thesis, they address obvious objections to it, etc.
4. The author's development of this thesis is clear and cogent.

Knowledge Rubric

1. The author writes about at least one perennial philosophical problem.
2. The author demonstrates an understanding of the central claims involved in generating the problem(s) they write about.
3. The author adequately explains or defines any philosophical terms that are crucial for understanding the problem(s) they write about.
4. The author demonstrates an understanding of why the problem(s) they write about is important.
5. The author demonstrates an understanding of the treatment of this problem by at least one historical or contemporary philosopher.
6. The author presents a charitable understanding of the philosopher's treatment of the problem, i.e., the author construes the philosopher's claims in a favorable way, avoids creating straw men, etc.
7. The author's discussion of the philosophical problem(s) they write about is illuminating: the author's paper would likely help someone who doesn't understand the problem well to attain a better understanding of it.

3. Timeline

Data from exit surveys will be reported and reviewed every year. Portfolios will be reviewed for learning goals on a three-year cycle.

2025-6: Proficiency in Understanding Arguments

2026-7: Proficiency in Evaluating and Producing Arguments

2027-8: Knowledge

4. Assessment Feedback Loop

The department will have an annual assessment meeting. At the meeting, data from direct and indirect measures will be reported and reviewed. We will discuss actions that could be taken to improve the program. We will also discuss actions that might be taken to improve the assessment process.