

# Annual Assessment Report

**Department:** Philosophy

**Academic Year:** 2019-2020

**Date of Submission:** September 15, 2020

**Department Chair:** Jim Taylor

## I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Item:</b> Collect the PLO data over several years to gather a larger sample size before drawing conclusions.</li></ul>	<p><b>Response:</b> We plan to do this over the next several years.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Item:</b> Make sure students are introduced to the Philosophy Major Skills Rubric prior to assigning the essay.</li></ul>	<p><b>Response:</b> We plan to do this the next time we assess our Skills PLO a few years from now.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Item:</b> Continue the valuable discussions on the Philosophy capstone course.</li></ul>	<p><b>Response:</b> We have consulted with Tatiana about “high-impact” learning activities we will consider including in our Philosophy Senior Seminar course. And we have continued to discuss possible changes to our majors’ capstone experience. For now, we have chosen to stick with Senior Seminar as a 4-unit major requirement. Each of us will continue to revise this course to make it more balanced between theory and practice as we take turns teaching it each year. Mark’s focus on moral character development last spring semester is an example of such a revision (his version of the course was previously quite abstract and theoretical). And Jim’s version of the course focuses on both writing to philosophical audiences and writing to lay Christian audiences about knowing God. Finally, David has been introducing a variety of “philosophy of life” practices in his version of the course, which focuses on free will and moral responsibility.</p>
<p><b>Notes:</b></p>	

## II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

*If your department participated in the ILO assessment you may use this section to report on your student learning in relation to the assessed ILO. The assessment data can be requested from the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.*

<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	Philosophical Reflections (GELO)
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	Jim Taylor is in charge, but all three of us (Nelson, Taylor, & Vander Laan) are involved.
<b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>	<p>David and Mark used different assessment methods in their PHI 6 courses during the spring 2020 semester for the purpose of assessing their students' learning relative to the Philosophical Reflections GELO (Jim didn't teach a section of PHI 6 in the spring).</p> <p>David asked his students to respond to the following prompt: "Consider your major or, if you have not chosen a major, a discipline that you are considering as a major. Describe in 3-4 sentences one way in which the metaphysical, epistemological, or ethical issues discussed in this class have affected the way you understand an issue in your discipline (or the discipline as a whole)."</p> <p>Mark embedded his assessment questions in a course essay assignment (see Appendix A for details). Here is the general prompt he used for this assignment (which includes the assessment questions): "Write an essay of ca 3-4 pages (on <b>one</b> of the questions or topics listed in Appendix A). Make the best answer you can, but your answer must also include a discussion of the following two points:</p> <p><b>a) Is this primarily an issue of metaphysics, epistemology or axiology (or some combination) of these?</b>  <b>b) How can other disciplines or majors studied at Westmont shed light on this problem? Explain."</b></p>
<b><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></b>	None.
<b>Major Findings</b>	See Appendix B for the new rubric we developed and used for this assessment. The rubric is a product of philosophy department conversations last year. Jim took our ideas and wrote a draft. Then we discussed the draft and revised it on the basis of our discussion. We developed the rubric ourselves because (1) we had been instructed to do so in a

	<p>memo sent to us by the PRC in response to one of our annual reports and (2) there was no other rubric available for the purpose of assessing student learning relative to the Philosophical Reflections GELO. No one else has used the rubric, but we would be happy to share it with Jesse Covington for his use in PO 30 and with the Augustinian Scholars instructors team for their use in IS 10H.</p> <p>David reported that 31 of 39 students responded. Of these, 20 scored "highly developed," 7 scored "developed," and 4 scored "emerging."</p> <p>Mark reported that 39 of 39 students responded. Of these, 1 scored "highly developed," 11 scored "developed," 23 scored "emerging," and 4 scored "initial."</p> <p>Combining these results yields the following: HD: 30%, D: 25%, E: 39%, I: 6%.</p> <p>Our benchmark for this assessment is "At least 80% proficient." If "proficient" means "either highly developed or developed," then our 55% (HD+D) result falls short. But if we take David's and Mark's results separately, David's class met the benchmark (at 87%) even though Mark's class did not (at 31%). Clearly, we will need to discuss this discrepancy in our upcoming conversations about our assessment of this GELO.</p> <p>The rubric was applied separately by Mark and David. We did not work together as a department to read and evaluate the student work. And there was no effort on our part to norm the individual instructors use of the rubric. So, the lower scores assigned to Mark's students don't necessarily represent a deficiency in those sections. Jim suspects the difference in scores between Mark's class and David's class were due to a combination of the different assessment instruments they used and their different interpretations of the evaluation categories. Our failure to work together on this assessment is due to some extent to the disruption caused by the COVID pandemic. In the future, we'll plan to use the same assignment and to work together on reading and evaluating the student's written work on that assignment.</p>
<b>Closing the Loop Activities</b>	<p>We plan to discuss these activities during our department meetings next year. Though David will be on sabbatical the entire year, Mark and Jim will continue to talk about what we can do to improve student learning in Philosophical Perspectives.</p>
<p><b>Collaboration and Communication</b></p> <p>TBA.</p>	

or/and

## II B. Key Questions

<b>Key Question</b>	Broadening the major (departmental and interdepartmental conversations about possible new courses, crosslisted courses, tracks, and interdisciplinary majors).
<b>Who is in Charge/Involved?</b>	All three of us (Mark, David, and Jim)
<b><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></b>	None.
<b><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></b>	None.
<b>Major Findings</b>	<p>Our conversations have been focused primarily on the possibility of adding new courses to our major curriculum to broaden and enrich the major and to make our major appealing to a broader range of students. Our recent splitting of three of our courses into two courses each (“Ancient &amp; Medieval Philosophy” into “Ancient Philosophy” and “Medieval Philosophy,” “Modern &amp; Contemporary Philosophy” into “Modern Philosophy” and “19<sup>th</sup> &amp; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy,” and “Critical Reasoning &amp; Logic” into “Critical Reasoning &amp; Logic” and “Formal Logic”) was already a step in this direction (as was Jim’s development of the new course “Intellectual Virtue &amp; Civil Discourse” and Ed Song’s introduction of the new course “Justice &amp; Public Policy”). These conversations about broadening the major have made us aware of the limits of a small three-person department. As a result, we have focused more attention on cross-listing courses with philosophical content already being taught by professors in other departments (e.g., Sameer Yadav’s course “Divine Hiddenness” and Lisa DeBoer’s course “Theory &amp; Criticism in the Arts”). But, though we appreciate the ways in which these cross-listed courses have broadened our major offerings, we have found that they can have a tendency to draw students away from our own philosophy department courses—at least for the time being, before more students become attracted to philosophy coursework. So, our next topic for conversation this coming year will be the possibility of working with other departments to develop interdisciplinary majors that incorporate philosophy courses. We hope such a move will be beneficial to all the departments involved by attracting more students to some of the courses we offer. Finally, we will discuss the possibility of reintroducing tracks to the philosophy major (e.g., pre-law, pre-med, pre-seminary, etc.). This change would potentially broaden our major by the addition of some courses from other disciplines and also attract more students to the philosophy major.</p>
<b>Recommendations</b>	None yet.

**Collaboration and Communication**

We have had some preliminary conversations with the E&B department about the development of a PPE (Philosophy, Politics, & Economics) major. We will continue these conversations and include the Political Science department.

**III. Appendices**

- A. New Philosophical Perspectives Rubric
- B. Mark Nelson's Philosophical Perspectives Final Essay Prompt

## Philosophical Reflections Rubric

*“Students will be able to articulate major philosophical ideas and describe their bearing on the Christian liberal arts”*

	<b>Highly Developed</b>	<b>Developed</b>	<b>Emerging</b>	<b>Initial</b>
<b>reality</b>	The student provides an interesting and sophisticated articulation of a metaphysical idea and an insightful articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a clear, specific, and accurate articulation of a metaphysical idea and a substantive articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a relatively vague articulation of a metaphysical idea and a relatively superficial articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student fails to articulate any metaphysical ideas or fails to describe the bearing of a metaphysical idea on the Christian liberal arts.
<b>knowledge</b>	The student provides an interesting and sophisticated articulation of an epistemological idea and an insightful articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a clear, specific, and accurate articulation of an epistemological idea and a substantive articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a relatively vague articulation of an epistemological idea and a relatively superficial articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student fails to articulate any epistemological ideas or fails to describe the bearing of an epistemological idea on the Christian liberal arts.
<b>value</b>	The student provides an interesting and sophisticated articulation of an axiological idea and an insightful articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a clear, specific, and accurate articulation of an axiological idea and a substantive articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student provides a relatively vague articulation of an axiological idea and a relatively superficial articulation of the bearing of that idea on the Christian liberal arts.	The student fails to articulate any axiological ideas or fails to describe the bearing of an axiological idea on the Christian liberal arts.

## Mark Nelson's Spring 2020 Philosophical Perspectives Essay Prompt for Philosophical Reflections GELO Assessment

### *Part Two: Essay*

Write an essay of ca 3-4 pages on one of the following questions or topics. Make the best answer you can, but your answer must also include a discussion of the following two points:

**a) Is this primarily an issue of metaphysics, epistemology or axiology (or some combination) of these?**

**b) How can other disciplines or majors studied at Westmont shed light on this problem? Explain.**

1. Read Mark Coppenger, "Vocation and World Hunger" (*Christian Scholars' Review*, 1983), and respond to the following: "Coppenger's article is a cop out. He clearly sees that Singer is right about our duties of famine relief, but he doesn't want to give up his money, so he hides behind the idea of 'Vocation'." Explain and critically assess this claim.

2. "Only a fool or a bigot would deny that ethics is relative. Only a fool could fail to see that different people live according to different ethical codes; and only a bigot could maintain that he or she is right and that everyone else is wrong." Discuss.

3. Read Nicole Cliffe, "How God Messed Up My Happy Atheist Life" (*Christianity Today*, May 2016), and respond to the following: "Cliffe's account of her own conversion to Christianity shows that philosophical thinking about religious belief is a waste of time." (Discuss with reference to at least two readings we have studied this semester.)

4. Read Chris Gabbard, "A Life Beyond Reason" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2010), and respond to the following: "Do Jeremy Bentham, Peter Singer or Immanuel Kant have anything to teach us about children like August? Do children like August have anything to teach us about the philosophies of Bentham, Singer or Kant?"