

**SJSU Annual Program Assessment Form: Philosophy  
Academic Year 2014-2015**

Department: Philosophy

Program: B A Philosophy and M A Philosophy

College: Humanities and the Arts

Website: <http://www.sjsu.edu/philosophy/>

Check here if your website addresses the University Learning Goals.  
See <http://www.sjsu.edu/philosophy/about/>

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**Part A**

**1. List of Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)**

**BA Philosophy Learning Outcomes**

Graduates with a BA in Philosophy will:

1. Be able to identify, discuss and constructively engage with, in both written and oral fashion, core areas and methods of Philosophy, and major figures and ideas in various historical periods and in various traditions from around the world.

-- How students demonstrate PLO#1: As with most academic disciplines, philosophy requires that success in upper division courses depends upon a firm grounding in the basic distinctions and concepts taught in lower division courses. We evaluate the development of PLO#1 through exams, oral presentations, and essays that presume a facility with fundamental philosophical concepts and an accurate understanding of the doctrines of major figures in the philosophical tradition.

As to areas of improvement, we have worried whether our majors and graduate students have adequate course work in the philosophy of language. Without understanding main developments in the philosophy of language, twentieth century philosophy remains nearly inaccessible.

2. Have the ability to understand texts and oral presentations and to identify and critique the arguments expressed in these texts.

-- How students demonstrate PLO#2: Excellence at PLO#2 is at the heart of the philosophy major. All majors are required to complete Phil 9, 57 or 157. All three of these courses center on identifying and critiquing arguments. But PLO#2 is observed in all courses taught in the SJSU philosophy department. The capacity to make cogent, clear and relevant arguments, both orally

and in writing, is a, if not the, the principal criterion by which students' work in philosophy classes is graded.

3. Have the ability successfully to collect and evaluate information and carry out research projects and successfully to share the results in both written and oral form.

-- How students demonstrate PLO#3: Through the department website and through classroom hand-outs, we make available detailed instructions on how to write successful philosophy papers. This past academic year, our tracking of the work of philosophy majors shows that they are adept and successful at research-based written and oral projects.

As far as improvement goes, this past academic year there has been a general concern among some philosophy faculty that more attention and training needs to be devoted to increasing level of rigor of philosophical argumentation among frosh and sophomores. To address this concern, our curriculum committee is taking steps to offer a 100W section taught from the Philosophy Department. Those students who need improvement in this aspect of writing skills will be advised to enroll in that section of 100W

4. Have an understanding of the demands of responsible citizenship and an understanding of how to make and defend ethical choices.

-- How students demonstrate PLO#4:

The SJSU Philosophy department offers many courses on both theoretical and applied ethics. We continue to track students' work in these classes. We continue to observe the trend that students improve in the understanding of the demands of responsible citizenship as they complete more courses. We focus our attention in particular on students' work in Phil 133 (*Ethics in Science*). The enrollment of this class is small enough that the responses of students can be especially well monitored. Further, the issues that arise in this class lead students to take a stand that often clashes with majority opinions. Our monitoring of this class continues to show students' readiness, with little exception, to make ethical and responsible choices, even if their choices conflict with majority opinions.

5. Have an understanding of the ways in which culture, race, ethnicity, gender, economic class, sexual orientation, and national membership influence perceptions about reality, knowledge and value.

--How students demonstrate PLO#5:

We collect data from essays and embedded questions in Phil 104, 108, 111, 118, 119, 120, 121, and 122. These courses focus on Latin American, Africana Feminist, Asian philosophy as well as center upon social and political philosophy in general. The results of our data show that our program does very well with respect to issues of culture, race, ethnicity, nationality and sexual orientation.

As mentioned in the AY 2013-14 Program Assessment, an examination of quizzes, exams and paper topics would indicate that the influence of economic class is less well discussed. There was a consensus of philosophy faculty that we must not underplay the role of economic class. Students may not relate immediately to correlation between ethnicity and the perception of reality,

knowledge and value. This issue was addressed in AY 2014-15 and will continue to be in AY 2015-16.

### **MA Philosophy Learning Outcomes**

Graduates with a MA in Philosophy will

1. Be able to identify, understand and critically discuss, both orally and in a sustained major written essay, and in a written exam taken without the benefit of notes, major figures, ideas, methods and core areas in various historical periods and in various traditions from around the world.  
  
-- How students demonstrate PLO#1: All students are required to pass a Comprehensive Qualifying Exam. This exam, administered each semester, determines whether students have professional preparedness in the history of philosophy, epistemology, ethics and metaphysics.
2. Have high level skills in communication, critical inquiry and the ability to collect and evaluate information successfully, and to use all of these skills in their own original research.  
  
-- How students demonstrate PLO#2: This outcome is evaluated through students' papers written especially in Graduate Seminars and in their capstone project. In the capstone project the M. A. candidate produces a thesis or a journal length essay while working one-on-one with a faculty member. Communication, critical inquiry and scholarly research are main criteria for evaluating this project.
3. Have an understanding of the demands of responsible citizenship and an understanding of how to make and defend ethical choices.  
  
-- How students demonstrate PLO#3: Required for the M. A. degree is an advanced course in ethics. But it is rarely the case the M. A. students take only one course in ethics. In order to fulfill the requirement of 18 units of upper division philosophy courses, M. A. students also select from courses in Medical Ethics (Phil 111), Environmental Ethics and Philosophy (Phil 126), Ethics in Science (Phil 133) and Computer Ethics and Society (Phil 134). Ethical decision-making is directly addressed in these classes. The Philosophy department also houses two Organizational Research Units (ORUs), the Center on Ethics and the Center for Comparative Philosophy. It yearly sponsors the annual Ethics Bowl. These three departmental affiliations also take responsible citizenship as one of their primary goals.
4. Have an understanding of the ways in which culture, race, ethnicity, gender, economic class, sexual orientation, and national membership influence perceptions about reality, knowledge and value.  
  
-- How students demonstrate PLO#4: The SJSU Philosophy Department is especially fortunate to have nationally renowned faculty in Latin American Philosophy, Africana Philosophy and Culture, Philosophy and Feminism, and Asian Philosophy. Our faculty's expertise in these fields attracts very competitive graduate students. Working with our faculty, our graduate students deepen their understanding as to how the listed social identities bear upon primary philosophical issues. Often, they proceed to Ph.D. programs where the influence of social identities on philosophical questions becomes their primary research focus.

5. Be able to teach and assess all these skills and competencies at the lower division undergraduate level.

-- How students demonstrate PLO#5: When graduate students have demonstrated responsibility and a high GPA, we hire them as tutors in the Philosophy center and as Instructional Student Assistants (ISAs). They help in grading assignments in very large classes. When second-year graduate students especially progress with distinction, budget permitting, we offer them the opportunity of teaching a lower division course. With the supervision and mentoring of permanent faculty, second-year M. A. students assume responsibility for selecting readings, offering presentations, conducting discussions and assigning grades. The Teaching Associate program directly presents our M. A. students with the opportunity to develop teaching skills and competency.

At philosophy department faculty meetings the ULGs were discussed and it was determined that our PLOs for both the B. A. and M. A. programs aligned with their specifications. There follows an itemization of how each of the philosophy B. A program PLOs and M. A. program PLOs map onto the five University Learning Goals.

#### ULG#1: Specialized Knowledge.

- 1) The B. A. Program. Although all of PLO's of the B. A. Program courses direct addresses the goal of specialized knowledge, PLO's #1 and PLO2#2 intensely do so, since they are particularly concerned with specific core areas and methods of method and require students to understand core texts and oral presentations and to identify and critique the arguments expressed in these texts
- 2) The M. A. Program. PLO#1 of the M. A. Program at a more advanced level of scholarship especially focuses on ULG#1 by requiring more in depth levels of research conducted upon major figures in the philosophical tradition.

#### ULG#2: Broad Integrative Knowledge.

1) The B. A. Program.

We coincide with this University Learning goal through our PLO#1 and PLO#3. PLO#1 requires that the understanding of the doctrines of especially influential and thought-provoking philosophers be woven into their historical periods. Understanding the doctrines of major figures in the philosophical tradition implies integration with other academic disciplines. Traditional major philosophical figures communicated with major figures political theory, science, mathematics and psychology, among other subjects. Often, as was the case with Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz and James, they were foundational figures in alternate fields: Aristotle in biology; Descartes, in mathematics; Leibniz in mathematics; and, James in psychology. PLO#3 aligns with the investigative requirement of ULG#2. The writing of a successful philosophy paper is an investigative process. The considerable weight placed on paper-writing in the philosophy major arises in that students need repeatedly think through, and think through again, their composition to excel. As a rule philosophy faculty allow students to hand in drafts of papers which are returned for further development. This leads to increased investigation, brainstorming and development of hypotheses.

2) The M. A. Program.

Here we align with ULG#2 through our Masters Program PLO#1 and PLO#2. As with the B. A. PLO#1, the M. A. PLO#1 requires that historical periods be taken into account in researching a philosopher

and philosophical periods. In general, greater expertise is required in the integration academic fields outside of philosophy. And the rigor and development of arguments is judged by higher standards.

### ULG#3: Intellectual Skills.

#### 1) The B. A. Program.

In our B. A. program, ULG#3 aligns with the PLO#3 and PLO#4 of our B. A. program. PLO#3 states: "Have the ability successfully to collect and evaluate information and carry out research projects and successfully to share the results in both written and oral form." The philosophy major requires that students become increasingly competent at handling epistemological concerns. This means that students come to distinguish between the various methods of gaining knowledge as they arise in creative activity, types of induction that would include both qualitative and quantitative methodologies as well as deductive methods, especially pertinent in quantitative methodologies. Collaborative activities are implicitly addressed by B. A. PLO#4. It states: "Have an understanding of the demands of responsible citizenship and an understanding of how to make and defend ethical choices." PLO#4 would address collaborative activities from an ethical point of view inasmuch as, as best practiced, collaborative activities are grounded in responsible citizenship and ethical choices.

#### 2) The M. A. Program.

In the M. A. Program, PLO#2 aligns with the comprehensive methodologies for attaining knowledge specified in ULO#3. The goal of collaborative activity merges with the M. A. PLO#5. Our M. A. students collaborate with faculty and students as ISA's and, even more as Teaching Associates.

### ULG#4: Applied Knowledge.

#### 1) The B. A. Program.

ULG#4 especially aligns with PLO#2 and PLO#3 in the B. A. program. To a lesser extent, it aligns with all five PLOs. PLO#2 states: "Have the ability to understand texts and oral presentations and to identify and critique the arguments expressed in these texts." PLO#3 states: Have the ability successfully to collect and evaluate information and carry out research projects and successfully to share the results in both written and oral form. The critiquing of arguments and the evaluation of information specified in these PLOs depends on applying theories to practical cases. There is a constant given and take between theory and fact. The same applies for metaphysical issues and issues of adequacy of knowledge. So, ULG#4 also applies to PLOs#1, #4 and #5. Without application to practical issues, philosophical theories lose their relevance. As for ULG#4's requirement that students have "the ability to work productively as individuals and in groups", all the PLOs would enjoin philosophy majors to work productively as individuals. Working productively in groups, arises again from PLO#4 since, working in groups must answer finally to responsible citizenship and ethical choices. On a less abstract level, the philosophy department maintains a Philosophy Center where majors congregate and discuss philosophical subjects. Also philosophy majors participate in the Philosophy Club where issues are discussed in groups.

#### 2) The M. A. Program.

ULG#4 inasmuch as it concerns the application of philosophical theories to practical issues, including issues in a new setting, the ULG#4 aligns especially with M. A. PLO#1 and PLO#2. The reasons are again the necessary given and take between philosophical theories and facts. Whether the issue

involves world-views, values or knowledge, any philosophical theory must be in dialogue with its applications for it to be relevant. For the M. A. program the ULG#4's requirement that students have "the ability to work productively as individuals and in groups" is covered by PLO#5. Since M. A. students work as ISA's and as Teaching Associates, they have direct experience working productively in and with groups.

ULG#5: Social and Global Responsibilities.

1) The B. A. Program

ULG#5 aligns directly with PLO#4 and PLO#5 in the B. A. Program. Nearly the identical language appears in our two PLOs as in the ULG#5.

2) The M. A. Program

ULG#5 again aligned directly with PLOs in the Masters Program. Here they are PLO#3 and PLO#4. Overlapping commitments and concerns are expressed.

**3. Alignment – Matrix of PLOs to Courses**

**BA Philosophy**

PLO#1: 09, 66, 70A, 70B, 104, 106, 108, 109, 112, 113, 119, 120, 121, 132, 149, 155, 157, 158, 159, 160, 190.

PLO#2: All undergraduate courses.

PLO#3: All undergraduate courses.

PLO#4: 61, 108, 110, 111, 115, 119, 121, 122, 126, 132, 133, 155, 186, 195.

PLO#5: 61, 104, 108, 111, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 186, 195.

**MA Philosophy**

PLO#1: All upper division courses, graduate seminars, and comprehensive exams.

PLO#2: graduate seminars: 290, 291, 292, 293, and capstone courses 298, and 299.

PLO#3: 108, 110, 111, 115, 119, 121, 126, 132, 133, 155, 186, 195, 292.

PLO#4: 104, 108, 111, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 155, 186, 195.

PLO#5: Teaching and grading experience as Philosophy center tutor, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate of Phil 10, 567 or 61.

**4. Planning – Assessment Schedule**

The B. A. Program: Department of Philosophy

Year	PLO#1	PLO#2	PLO#3	PLO#4	PLO#5	IEA data	data from exams and papers	faculty consensus
2014-15	C	C	C		C	C	C	C
2015-16		IC	C					

2016-17			IC	C	C			
2017-18				IC	IC			

C = Data collected

I = Improvement implemented (if necessary)

The M. A. Program: Department of Philosophy

Year	PLO#1	PLO#2	PLO#3	PLO#4	PLO#5	IEA data	data from exams and papers	faculty consensus
2014-15	C	C				C	C	C
2015-16	IC	IC	C					
2016-17			IC	C	C			
2017-18				IC	IC			

C = Data collected

I = Improvement implemented (if necessary)

5. Student Experience

Our B. A. and M. A. PLOs as well as the ULGs are on our departmental website at

<http://www.sjsu.edu/philosophy/about>

They are discussed in advising sessions with frosh majors, with students entering the Masters Program and with transfer student advising sessions.

**Part B**

**1. Graduation Rates by Entering Cohorts:**

First-Time Freshmen				Undergraduate Transfer				New Cre
Fall 2008 Cohort: 6-Year Graduation Rate				Fall 2011 Cohort: 3-Year Graduation Rate				Fall 2011
Program Cohort Size	Program Grad Rate	College Average Grad Rate - All Students Who Entered This College	University Average Grad Rate - All Students Who Entered the University	Program Cohort Size	Program Grad Rate	College Average Grad Rate - All Students Who Entered This College	University Average Grad Rate - All Students Who Entered the University	Program Cohort Size

<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60.0%</b>	<b>50.5%</b>	<b>49.7%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>50.9%</b>	<b>55.3%</b>
URM	1	100.0%	49.5%	40.7%	1	100.0%	50.6%	55.2%
Non-URM	3	66.7%	50.9%	53.3%	6	33.3%	51.5%	54.9%
All others	1	0.0%	50.0%	52.9%	1	100.0%	50.0%	56.9%

## 2. Headcount of Program Majors by Degree

	Fall 2014					Total
	New Students		Continuing Students			
	FT Admit	New Transf	Continuing	Retn. Tranf	Returning	
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>90</b>
BA	6	7	54	4	1	72
MA	7		11			18

## 3. Student-Faculty Ratio (SFR) and Average Headcount per Section

	Fall 2014		
	Subject SFR	College SFR	University SFR
Lower Division	39.6	25.6	31.0
Upper Division	39.3	20.9	25.5
Graduate Division	9.4	11.8	20.8

	Fall 2014		
	Subject Headcount per Section	College Headcount per Section	University Headcount per Section
Lower Division	43.9	25.1	35.6
Upper Division	42.1	21.6	28.0
Graduate Division	6.0	6.6	15.8

## 4. Percentage of Full-Time Equivalent Faculty (FTEF)

	Fall 2014			
	Department FTEF #	Department FTEF %	College FTEF %	University FTEF %
Tenured/Tenure-track	7.5	54%	39.8%	42.8%
Not tenure-track	6.5	46%	60.2%	57.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Part C

### 10. Closing the Loop/Recommended Actions

Actions recommended this year:

1. Members of the philosophy faculty expressed concern as to whether our majors and graduate students are receiving adequate preparation in the philosophy of language, especially in regard to its elemental role in the development of twentieth century philosophy.
2. Several faculty members have voiced concern regarding the rigor of philosophical argumentation especially as found less advanced students. A sharpening of argument-based writing is needed most often among frosh and sophomores, but also, on occasion, with upper division students.



3. Inasmuch as the philosophy department has high enrollments due to the large percentage of General Education courses, we are not concerned about non-major enrollments. The number of majors, both undergraduate and graduate, however, remains an issue. We have strategized as to how to increase these numbers.

### **11. Assessment Data**

Our primary method of data collection is through focused prompts of essay topics and embedded questions in quizzes and exams. Comparisons can then be made between semesters, and in the case of particularly worrisome issues, longitudinally across academic years. But we also depend on informally collected data. Sources consist in a) informal surveys of graduate students as to recommendations for curricular changes; b) recurrent questioning of faculty as to possible deficiencies of students' understanding of philosophical periods and methods; c) fact gathering from faculty concerning students' writing strengths and weaknesses; d) methodic follow-ups of both B. A. and M. A. graduates tracking those who go on to graduate programs in philosophy and graduate programs in non-philosophical subjects.

### **12. Analysis**

In the previous year's annual program assessment (AY 2013-14), a survey of students papers topics and embedded questions in exams had indicated students were doing fine job with B. A. PLO#5 regarding how culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and national membership influence perceptions about reality, knowledge and value. In that assessment it was noted, however, there had not been an adequate showing of questions and topics concerning economic class. In AY 2014-15, two senior faculty members added modules in their courses, focusing on the study of major philosophers who center on class and its influences on the perception of reality, knowledge and value. The quality of students' papers and exams, demonstrated that students in these courses excelled in writing on this issue. We believe we have addressed this issue and plan to continue to do so.

As to the first issue mentioned in 'closing the loop' above, that is, the strengthening of the focus on the philosophy of language, in departmental discussion, it was suggested that this might be accomplished through focusing at the same time on comparative philosophy. Faculty members offered course plans that would teach the philosophy of language from both a Western and non-Western perspective.

In regard to the second issues stated in 'closing the loop,' we discussed proceeding with a major curricular change in which the philosophy faculty. We plan to offer a Philosophy 100W course. There is a consensus among the philosophy faculty that we should go ahead with this plan. From the vantage point of a Philosophy 100W course, we could directly continue to sharpen our major's writing skills.

The last issue mentioned above in closing the loop is the need to increase the number of majors and graduate students. Two strategies were discussed: first, inform students and communicate university-wide that philosophy is an optimal pre-law major; second, to develop our recent tenure-track hire in the philosophy of technology so as to attract students planning a high-tech career to philosophy.

### **13. Proposed changes and goals (if any)**

1. In keeping with the first concern in 'Closing the Loop,' two senior faculty members will be teaching courses in AY 2015-16 that focus on the philosophy of language from a cross-cultural perspective.
2. Regarding the second issue stated in 'Closing the Loop,' the departmental curriculum committee will take steps to add 100W course as taught through the Philosophy Department.
3. As to the third issue mentioned in 'Closing the Loop,' that is, our plan to increase the amount of majors, we will act on both strategies mentioned. The university pre-law advisor is a senior philosophy professor. She will continue to increase our pre-law majors through advising, workshops and teaching the philosophy of law. Regarding the second strategy, we successfully hired a new tenure faculty member whose Area of Specialization is the Philosophy of Technology. He has a track record of excellent teaching. This assures us that students planning a career in high-tech will be attracted to his classes and to philosophy. There is some delay in this action, however, because the new hire was awarded a leave for AY 2015-16, but we are confident that this strategy, although delayed, will be pursued successfully when the new hire actively joins the Philosophy Department in AY 2016-17.