

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015

1. Action items from 2013-2014 report: "...goals for the 2014-2015 Academic Year: Increase the total number of students enrolled in philosophy classes. Increase the number of majors and minors." Both goals were met. In 2013-2014 the total number of students taught by Professors Morgan and White were 360 while in 2014-2015 the total is 384. Total number of majors and minors increased by three. In all fairness it must be mentioned that due to changes in the core curriculum Dr. Morgan taught significantly fewer non philosophy class students ('13-'14 127, '14-'15 52) and more philosophy class students ('13-'14 85, '14-'15 91.) To complicate statistical matters even more, few students enroll in the popular Business Ethics class under the Philosophy Department number but since they were taught by philosophy department faculty at least half the time ( this is a team taught class) the philosophy department can legitimately claim credit for half the total number of students in the class:

**ENROLLMENT NUMBERS**

|             | <b>BADM</b> | <b>PHIL</b> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|             | <b>364</b>  | <b>277</b>  |
| SPRING 2010 | 30          | 3           |
| SPRING 2011 | 26          | 5           |
| SPRING 2012 | 17          | 18          |
| SPRING 2013 | 29          | 6           |
| SPRING 2014 | 26          | 6           |
| SPRING 2015 | 30          | 4           |

Department members continue to teach Phil 417 (Readings in Philosophy) and Phi 477 (Research in Philosophy) overload for no compensation.

In order to improve student learning the philosophy department last year proposed the implementation of the following:

1. Increase the number of written assignments required for completion of a particular class, with appropriate adjustments made for level and topic of course.
2. Rather than simply require a final paper to be submitted as part of the final exam, first drafts will be required to be reviewed by faculty, with specific suggestions made for improvement.
3. For upper level seminars, students will review each other's work, with written comments submitted by reviewer to author, to be considered for inclusion in completed paper.
4. Each upper level seminar will include a formal presentation (as part of PIC implementation) that will then be formally evaluated by other members of the class.
5. An archive of randomly selected student work will be created and kept in the department chair's office, organized by year and class, to track changes and improvements in student work.

6. This process will be ongoing and archives of student work will be made available for review by accrediting agencies.

All of the above were implemented in 2014-2015, but suggestion #3 soon proved to be ineffective and was terminated. For 2015-2016 the department will have to implement instruction in the process of scholarly review and criticism of academic papers.

2. Departmental learning outcomes and assessment.

Dr. Morgan attended the Hodge Institute 2015 session devoted to assessment. The assessment goals set last year for implementing assessment of the philosophy programs and philosophy classes have been met. For individual courses those goals were: Every course taught will have a syllabus that conforms to the 'syllabus template.' Department syllabi will be revised to conform to standards as the relevant class is taught. The grades students earn will be used to assess progress but in addition a portfolio system will be used as well. A collection of student work to include tests, research papers and projects will be assembled for review by Thiel faculty outside the department, and by philosophy faculty from neighboring institutions. Results of portfolio reviews will be kept, and used to revise classes as needed.

Student work product from all philosophy classes was collected as were three senior theses. Using the rubrics developed for the 2013-2014 Middle States review (see appendix 1) a base line was established to track the success of achieving the department's educational goals.

Philosophy program goals are: demonstrate skills of philosophical analysis and argumentation, show a command of the major events in western philosophical history (and the persons involved), and demonstrate competence in analyzing the major ethical traditions of western culture.

All of the above goals were met, but one important caveat must be noted. A random sample of student work was collected. With the exception of the Senior Thesis the population sampled contained students of vastly different abilities. Lower level classes have students from every academic year (and ability) and even upper level classes have majors as well as students with only one prior class in philosophy. Of course this is the result of have a small number of philosophy majors, and college core requirements placing seniors in need of a humanities class in an introductory class aimed at freshman. Keeping a sample size manageable means year to year comparisons are not very reliable.

3. & 4. Summary of assessment results and how they were used

The philosophy department considers the most important assessment tool of program success to be the Senior Thesis. This year our senior's work was varied. This year there were three senior theses. One was judged to be 'commendable' as measured by the rubric

contained in appendix one. That student was awarded departmental honors at graduation both for this work and grades earned over four years. Two other senior's work earned 'Satisfactory' scores. Our one student interested in going to graduate school submitted his thesis as part of the application process to two graduate schools and was accepted to both.

As a result of review of the Introduction to Language and Logic class (and the need to boost enrollment) the name of the class was changed to Critical Thinking. Along with Dr. Montgomery and Dr. Morgan, Dr. White is investigating the creation of a Critical Thinking (non-symbolic logic) class which will use medical examples to illustrate problem solving techniques. We hope this will be of interested to students in the Health Professions Institute.

Student's lack of ability to write clearly is our biggest problem. Our writing samples show the typical Thiel 'bi-polar' distribute of ability. Our best student work is every bit as good as it ever was but sadly there is just not enough of it. We have students that struggle, to put it politely. Since all three of us think that the best way to address this is to increase the amount time spent on both reading and writing, but spreading the work assignments out over the semester such that there are more numerous, but shorter, assignments. Let's hope this works.

5. Action items for implementation during 2015-2016.

We shall implement a more frequent test/quiz schedule in all classes since research indicates that more frequent testing improves information retention. We shall continue recruitment efforts with the admissions staff to bring high quality students to Thiel and to philosophy. We shall continue our efforts to enhance student learning by increasing the number of quizzes in lower level class, implementing a paper presentation and criticism model in upper level seminars (after appropriate instruction in the process), and we will require drafts of all papers submitted in all classes. We believe that Thiel has a solid (but limited in scope) undergraduate philosophy program and that even in this era of focus on career preparation as we become more visible the value of the study of philosophy will be clear to many more.

Respectfully submitted

A. White

Chair, Philosophy Department

Thiel College

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### Appendix SLO Assessment Rubric

| <b>SLO</b>  | <b>Commendable</b>   | <b>Satisfactory</b>   | <b>Poor</b>  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Mechanics<br>(Weight 10%)                             | No errors of grammar, spelling, syntax, sentence and paragraph construction, or thematic development.  | Fewer than three minor errors of grammar, spelling, syntax, sentence and paragraph construction, or thematic development. | Six or more errors of grammar, spelling, syntax, sentence and paragraph construction, or thematic development. |
| Summary/Source Materials<br>(Weight: 10%)             | Accurate summary and/or use of primary/subject source material.  | Summaries and/or uses of primary/subject source material display three or fewer errors.                                   | Summaries and/or uses of primary/subject source material display major errors.                                 |
| Evidence of argument/analysis<br>(Weight: 30%)        | Evidence of original argument or analysis by the student.  | Evidence of attempts at the construction of an original argument or analysis by the author.                               | Little evidence of attempts at the construction of an original argument or analysis by the author.             |
| Connections to History of Philosophy<br>(Weight: 10%) | Connection of issue under discussion to major traditions of philosophical history (where appropriate.) | Topic and theme related to assignment.  | Topic and/or theme unrelated to assignment   |
| Support of Thesis<br>(Weight: 30%)                    | Thesis is well supported with textual evidence and argument in a clear and accurate fashion.           | Thesis is reasonably supported with textual evidence and argument in a clear and accurate fashion.                        | Thesis is poorly supported with textual evidence and argument in a clear and accurate fashion.                 |
| Organization<br>(Weight: 10%)                         | Organization (chronological, logical, or dramatic) is appropriate and effective.                       | Organization (chronological, logical, or dramatic) is appropriate and effective.  | Organization (chronological, logical, or dramatic) is poor   |