

Department of Philosophy  
Illinois State University

**Philosophy Major Program Assessment Plan**

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The assessment plan for the philosophy major includes a regular, concerted effort to determine the outcomes of students' experiences in what we consider to be key areas of the discipline. Students will be given pre- and post-tests aimed at gauging the skills and knowledge they gain as they pass through the program. Each year the Teaching Committee, with the assistance of faculty members conversant with the areas of philosophy described below, will construct and administer an examination for new majors and an examination for seniors. The results of these examinations will be compared and considered along with a review of course syllabi and other course materials to determine whether seniors' understandings and skills reflect stated program goals and to determine the "value added" over their whole course of studies. The Teaching Committee will make recommendations regarding course content and instructional methods to the Curriculum Committee and the department, which may in turn alter the program.

**Logic and Philosophical Methodology**

Departmental requirements for study of philosophical methods and logic include PHI 199, and either 112 or 210. The aim of these courses is to introduce philosophy majors to the common structures of rigorous, critical argumentation, to develop the formal skills required to understand and evaluate complex philosophical and formal arguments, and to develop some understanding of the implications of the analysis of language and logic for broader philosophical issues. Various pedagogical strategies may be employed in these courses, but these techniques should not become ends in themselves: it is not sufficient for a student to learn to construct proofs in the symbolism of first-order logic while not understanding conceptually.

PHI 199 aims to prepare philosophy majors and minors for 200 and 300 level courses. It teaches students to apply certain fundamental logical principles that are used frequently in philosophy (such as *reductio* and *constructive dilemma*), to construct thought experiments, search for counterexamples, and make use of certain contemporary methods (such as possible worlds analysis). The course aims to enable students to understand and manipulate the "objection and reply" format common in philosophy, to write lucid, forceful, and graceful philosophical papers, to disabuse students of the idea that "anything is possible" in philosophy, and to make students aware of research resources in philosophy, such journals, encyclopedias, *The Philosopher's Index*, and special volumes of articles devoted to a single issue, topic, or area of philosophy.

The goals of PHI 112 are to bring students to understand what it is to construct a systematic deductive proof of a conclusion from given premises, to grasp the role of syntactic structure (at the level of first-order predicate logic) in relating the sentences that comprise a proof regardless of subject matter, to construct simple step-by-step proofs on various topics, written in English prose, using a quasi-formal language

corresponding to formulas of first-order logic, to construct simple models that serve as counterexamples to given English statements, to demonstrate understanding of the truth conditions of English sentences whose structure is captured by the first-order logic, and to understand first-order logic well enough to grasp some of its elementary applications in further philosophy courses

Students who complete PHI 210, which should include most philosophy majors, will understand in some detail logical/mathematical notation and the function of that notation in marking significant logical distinctions between, e.g., functions, constants, logical operators, and the like. They will be able to construct derivations in a consistent and complete natural deduction system of first-order logic, demonstrate understanding of the truth conditions of English sentences whose structure is captured in the first-order logic by constructing models that serve as counterexamples, construct simple models of first-order theories, understand some philosophical issues associated with first-order logic (such as the “paradoxes” of the material conditional, puzzles about what constants refer to, apparent failures of Leibniz Law, and the limitations of a purely extensional language), and understand first-order logic well enough to grasp its applications in further course work in philosophy or mathematics.

### **History of Ethics**

Philosophy students are required to demonstrate a significant depth of knowledge of the main theories and figures in value theory in the Western philosophical tradition from Classical Greece to the present. They will also demonstrate proficiency in critical reading, writing and discussion of these thinkers and ideas as well as in the methods of moral reasoning relevant to an analysis of the ethical dimensions of controversial social issues.

To this end, philosophy major requirements include a course on the history of classical ethical theory, PHI 232. This course aims to provide students with an introduction to how the major philosophers in the Western world from Socrates to Nietzsche have attempted to answer the most fundamental questions of normative ethics concerning how we ought to live our lives and what is of value in human life, as well as what they have had to say about the nature of ethics as a discipline (including its relation to other branches of philosophy, to the sciences and to the social background in which their theories arose); how to identify, analyze and evaluate the kinds of arguments that have been made in support of these views. Major candidates for inclusion include Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Butler, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Mill, and Nietzsche. This survey includes introduction to the methodologies used by moral philosophers in articulating and defending their theories, skills that should help students in developing more sophisticated analyses of current social problems.

### **History of Metaphysics and Epistemology**

The required history of philosophy sequence (PHI 254, 255) aims to implement the department's goal that students gain substantial knowledge of the main lines of development of the western tradition in metaphysics and epistemology. Courses should be designed so that they display discernible historical threads and continuity of subject matter. Since no course can provide complete coverage of any of the main periods or

movements, instructors should aim to include enough material to enable students to carry their studies forward in a generally informed, though not necessarily expert, manner.

Students should demonstrate substantial knowledge of a reasonable range of the following topics. In epistemology: skepticism, sense data and perceptual beliefs, memory and testimony, rationalism, empiricism, Kantian idealism, the problem of induction, epistemic justification, theories of explanation, theories of knowledge. In metaphysics: the appearance/reality distinction, time and causation, the mind/body problem, personal identity, god, freedom, problems of individuation/ontology, natural kinds/essentialism, theories of truth, and the realism/idealism debate.

Here is a list of schools and figures from which these courses should include some substantial range. There are five periods to be covered by PHI 254, the pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, the Hellenistics, and medieval philosophy. The main point for students to understand about the pre-Socratics is how they invented secular inquiry into nature. The main candidates for coverage here are perhaps Democritus, Parmenides, Pythagoras and Heraclitus. Next comes Plato with the Socratic introduction of philosophical normative inquiry. From Plato students should learn about (1) Socratic dialectic and its relation to the sophists, (2) the unifying power of the theory of forms to constitute the first great western philosophical system comprehending metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, politics, and aesthetics. In Aristotle students should encounter the beginnings of logic, the hylomorphic constitution of objects, the theory of causation, the analysis of soul and perception, the concepts of eudaimonia, practical reason, virtue, the voluntary, the polis and citizenship. In the Hellenistics, the Epicureans and Stoics, students should encounter a hedonistic conception of happiness and a deontic conception of moral obligation. Themes of lasting philosophical interest from the medievals include Augustine on time, freedom and determinism, and the nature of god; Anselm's ontological argument; Aquinas' neo-Aristotelian metaphysics and epistemology, proofs of god's existence, and natural law ethics and politics; and Occam's nominalism.

There are three basic areas of study to include in PHI 255: rationalism, empiricism and Kant. The course should include some of the cultural background as a stimulus to modern interest in skepticism: the new science of Galileo and Newton; the new-found importance of the individual in the protestant reformation; the renaissance of the arts; and the economic changes in Europe due to the voyages of exploration, the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism. Of the three main seventeenth century rationalists, Descartes is foremost and should be included while the work of Spinoza and Leibniz may find a place as well. Topically, students should learn how rationalism conceptualizes the mind (the cogito), god, the world (mechanism), individual, moral and political freedom, teleology, and methodology (clear and distinct ideas, mathematical method, identity of indiscernibles). Among the three chief empiricists of the eighteenth century, Hume should receive the most attention, though Locke and Berkeley are indispensable. This part of the course should present empiricist conceptions of experience, ideas (nominalism), principles of association (induction), causality (miracles), and god. The main subjects of study in Kant should include the synthetic a priori; transcendental idealism (transcendental argument); space, time and the categories; the critique of rationalist metaphysics (god, soul, freedom).

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