

## **DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY ASSESSMENT PLAN**

### **I. RATIONALE FOR THE PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS**

The Philosophy Department's purpose is to teach students to cultivate the habit of examining their lives, and society, in meaningful, creative, and productive ways. Philosophy asks the big questions: Who am I? Why am I here? How should I live? What makes a society good? What is justice? Philosophy students learn to think critically and creatively about questions such as these.

More specifically, our educational goals are to teach students to:

- Understand philosophical concepts, ideas, and arguments;
- Acquire the skills to critically analyze philosophical and other arguments and assumptions as well as provide evidence for claims; and
- Examine and apply abstract ideas to concrete situations and to individual and social problems.

#### **1. Rationale for emphasis in Ethics and Society**

With an ethics and society emphasis students have the opportunity to concentrate their studies in ethical, social, and political philosophy and to apply theory to issues and problems arising in public life.

#### **2. Rationale for the major in International Human Rights**

The International Human Rights program at Webster University seeks to encourage greater understanding of international human rights standards, problems, and solutions. The Philosophy Department offers a major and a minor in International Human Rights for students interested in careers in human rights and humanitarian support, study, advocacy, and protection.

### **II. LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THE PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS**

The learning outcomes for the Philosophy Program are:

- understanding of philosophical concepts, ideas, and arguments;
- acquisition of skills to critically analyze arguments and assumptions, as well as to provide evidence for claims;
- examination and application of philosophical ideas to concrete situations and current problems, from both individual and social perspectives.

**1. Learning outcomes for the emphasis in Ethics and Society are:**

- knowledge of the ethical issues pertinent to several disciplines, professions and topics;
- strong grounding in ethical, social and political philosophy;
- ability to identify and analyze ethical issues and problems that arise in public life;
- enhanced critical thinking skills related to moral theory and decision making;
- capacity to develop and defend positions and to anticipate objections and alternatives;
- ability to evaluate moral problems through several theoretical frameworks.

**2. Learning outcomes for the major in International Human Rights are:**

- knowledge of generally accepted international human rights standards;
- familiarity with widely discussed theories of human rights and criticisms of those theories;
- familiarity with a sampling of current and historical human rights problem areas;
- capacity to reflect critically on the workings of an organization that is active in the area of international human rights or on focused human rights related observations;
- intermediate foreign language capability.

### **III. ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THE PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS:**

#### **1. Assessment of learning outcomes in the major in Philosophy and the major with an emphasis in Ethics and Society are focused on:**

- the understanding of philosophical concepts, ideas, and arguments. This will be demonstrated through an ability to interpret clearly and precisely philosophical questions and arguments. The means for measuring are:
  - assignment of frequent short papers that assess the ability to explain clearly basic philosophical concepts and arguments;
  - class discussions that demonstrate philosophical modes of communication.
- the acquisition of skills critically to analyze philosophical arguments and assumptions, as well as provide evidence for claims. This will be demonstrated through an ability of interpret, clarify, and evaluate clearly and precisely philosophical questions and arguments. The means for measuring are:
  - assignment of longer papers that assess the ability to both explain and analyze philosophical concepts and arguments.
  - class discussions that demonstrate philosophical modes of communication.
- the ability to examine and apply philosophical ideas to concrete situations and current problems from both individual and social perspectives. This will be demonstrated through an ability to construct, develop, and sustain philosophical arguments both orally and in writing that link up abstract ideas to concrete cases. The means for measuring are:
  - assignment of papers that assess the ability to use relevant and telling examples to help flesh out and clarify philosophical concepts and arguments;
  - class discussions that demonstrate philosophical modes of communication.

#### **2. Assessment of learning outcomes in the major in International Human Rights are measured by the students' abilities to explain both orally and in adequate, if not exceptional, prose to a trained professional:**

- the content and primary application of generally accepted human rights standards;
- key insights and common criticisms of widely discussed theories of human rights;
- key elements of some current and some historically important human rights problems;
- assessment of a human rights group's mission, organization and activity in light of the student's academic work in the HRTS major and the student's assessment of academic work in the HRTS major in light of observation of and/or work with a human rights group;
- completion of 12 hours of college level foreign language study or by examination by the Department of International Languages and Cultures.

#### **IV. OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT ON THE COURSE LEVEL**

1. Course objectives generically stated and to be specified appropriately in a course syllabus:

- to familiarize students with some of the main ideas of the topic covered;
- to provide students with a detailed understanding of some of the aspects of the topic;
- to help students develop a strong grasp of the texts covered in the course;
- to help students develop their own minds through sustained encounters with the thinkers studied in the course;
- to help students gain a deeper sense of their own life and its possible meanings and values in relation to the content of the course.

2. **Course outcomes generically stated and to be specified appropriately in a course syllabus:**

- ability to explain both orally and in adequate, if not exceptional prose, to a trained professional in philosophy, some of the key insights of the topic covered in the course;
- ability to provide insightful commentary on some of the world's great philosophical texts, as determined by a trained professional in philosophy;
- ability to think and write critically at an advanced undergraduate level as determined by a trained professional in philosophy;
- increased ability to be original and creative in thought and writing as determined by something that is not quite measurable.

3. **Scoring of assessment:**

- valuable and thoughtful contributions to class discussions;
- written graded work scored by grades that mean:
  - A: outstanding understanding of the material, ability to explain, creatively integrate, compare, contrast, and critique the material; ability to structure thought and present it in a logical flow.
  - B: good understanding of the material; some ability to explain, integrate, and critique the material; ability to structure the paper in a logical flow.
  - C: knowledge of the material but little ability to explain, integrate, or critique it.
  - D: inadequate knowledge of the material, inadequate ability to explain, integrate or critique it.
  - F: no demonstration of knowledge of material, ability to explain, integrate or critique it.

## **V. CLOSING THE FEEDBACK LOOP**

Towards the end of each spring semester, the Philosophy Department will schedule a meeting of its faculty for assessing the performances of the philosophy majors. After documenting the learning outcomes, based on our learning objectives, the results will be reviewed by the Chair of the Philosophy Department and communicated to the Philosophy Department faculty.