DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

– GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS –

Assessment Plan

Version 1.1; last revision: November 8th, 2010

I.   GENERAL REMARKS

1. The Department of Philosophy is serious about educating its students in an accountable way. We understand that what counts when all is said and done are results, not intentions.

2. Not everything, however, that a Liberal Arts education desires to achieve results in directly or indirectly measurable learning outcomes, as many learning objectives go beyond teaching simple skills or facts. Many goals we have for our students—e.g., the goal to become a responsible citizen, to find creative solutions for a problem, or to be an open-minded partner in a globalized world—refer to dispositions. But dispositions are held beliefs or character traits that do not become visible (and hence not measurable) unless certain circumstances obtain. (We never find out whether sugar has the disposition of being water-soluble unless we put in a glass of water.) We therefore understand that there are limitations as to what assessment in a Liberal Arts context can accomplish, for many goals may remain elusive to measurement.

3. We resist the current notion of leaving K-12 and colleges with all the blame if education fails. Our current concept of Higher Education presupposes middle-class families that prepare their children for school by having instilled in them certain values and having taught them certain skills and attitudes that are prerequisite for success. If, now, the way the society is set up and the economy works is such that good parenting is not an option for all and many of our freshmen are therefore ill-prepared for college, not just in terms of their academic preparation but much more importantly in terms of their study habits, work ethic, and other attitudes crucial for succeeding in school, then we are happy to try and influence our students, but there are certainly limits as to what we can achieve in this respect. We think this highly unfortunate situation requires serious joint efforts by our society as a whole and measures taken by the legislator and business leaders in particular; it can't be remedied by "pedagogical eros" alone.

4. In light of the limitations we face and the (partial) responsibility we accept, we have identified five tools to assess student leaning outcomes as detailed further below. Although assessment is an ongoing process that, on the course-level, takes place in our class rooms on a daily basis, we shall engage in additional, program-

level assessment three times a year, for the most part facilitated by the Department Assessment Committee.

II.   ACRONYMS, OPERATIONALIZATIONS, AND PROCEDURES

1. Acronyms. For the sake of brevity, this document uses the following acronyms: DAC = Department Assessment Committee – CT(T) = Critical Thinking (Test) – PKT = Philosophy Knowledge Test – GELO = General Education Learning Outcomes.

2. Operationalizing Learning Outcomes. Assessment requires that student learning outcomes have been operationalized, i.e., made measurable. The basic tool for defining and then, partly, operationalizing learning outcomes in the various areas that fall under the Department's teaching mission, like CT skills or disciplinary knowledge, is a curriculum map. The curriculum map for the programs we offer is documented in Appendix A below.

3. Procedures and Time Lines

3.1 Each year in early February the DAC meets, identifies the winner of the Best Essay Contest and hence the recipient of Churchill Scholarship (see Section III.4 below for details), and based on its findings makes recommendations to the Department Chairperson for inclusion to the agenda of the annual Department Fall Retreat.

3.2 Each year in early May the DAC meets, reviews student portfolios, results from the CTT, PKT and GELO (see sections III.1–3 and III.5 below for details), and makes recommendations to the Department Chairperson for inclusion to the agenda of the annual Department Fall Retreat.

3.3 Each year during the on-duty week in August, all Teaching Faculty in the Department go on a one-day Department Fall Retreat to celebrate successes in the class room (what went well), to share their plans for the next academic year (what faculty will try to do differently), and to discuss the outcomes and recommendations made by the DAC.

3.4 In cooperation with the Department Chairperson, the Department Lead Advisor shall not only remind faculty of applicable policies, procedures, and deadlines but shall also put a hold on those student accounts who were found not to be compliant with departmental assessment requirements (e.g., neglecting their portfolio or delaying the CTT or PKT).

III.   ASSESSMENT TOOLS

1. Student Portfolio

1.1 *Function*. To assess, longitudinally, our students'
- writing skills,
- language comprehension skills, and their
- contextual/applied CT skills.

1.2 *Contents*. A complete portfolio will consist of five items; the student's:
- best 110/111 writing assignment;
- best paper from a 300-level history class;
- best paper from a 3/400-level topics class;
- best paper from a 500-level class;
- final essay (capstone work).

1.3 *Implementation*. It is the responsibility of each student to submit items to his or her portfolio to the Department secretary, who shall maintain all portfolios on the Department's o-drive. During the on-duty week of each term, each faculty member shall check whether their student advisees are in compliance or not and remind them to keep their portfolio current if not.

The DAC will meet every spring to assess (any additions to) the portfolio of all active majors and minors. To do that, the DAC will meet towards the end of the spring term (usually, sometimes between the last week of classes and Commencement) and use a rubrics sheet (see Appendix B) for its assessment work. Within a week from the meeting, the DAC will then forward a summary of its findings and a bullet list with talking points and recommendations to the Department Chairperson. The Department Chairperson will then use the DAC's bullet list to facilitate a conversation on teaching effectiveness and goals for the new academic year during the annual Department Fall Retreat.

2. Critical Thinking Test (CTT)

2.1 *Function*. To assess student progress in
- non-contextual CT skills;

both at the course and the program level.

2.2 *Contents*. The Department shall choose
- an outside, nationally recognized CTT that matches most closely the textbook we use.

2.3 *Implementation*. The CTT will be administered two times.

2.3.1 Course-level assessment. At the beginning and the end of each section of the PHIL-12000 the Department offers students will take the CTT as part of their normal course work; the first time students take the CTT, test results will count towards their attendance/oral participation grade, the second time test results will contribute to their final grade.

2.3.2 Program-level assessment. Students take the CTT for the first time when they declare a major or minor in one of our programs. Students majoring in one of our programs take the CTT for the second time when they declare a faculty mentor to work with for their capstone work. Both times the CTT is made part of the admittance process, i.e., getting admitted to the program, getting admitted to their capstone work resp. Students minoring in one of our programs will be asked by their academic advisor to take the CTT once they are about finishing their degree requirements.

2.3.3 Test results will monitored using a feedback form (see Appendix C) and discussed by the DAC during its spring meeting. The DAC will report its findings and any recommendations it might have to all instructors of the PHL-12000 (course-level assessment) and to the Department Chairperson (program-level assessment) for inclusion to the agenda of the annual Department Fall Retreat.

3. Philosophy Knowledge Test (PKT)

3.1 *Function*. To assess
  • general disciplinary knowledge
our students have acquired after they are half-way through the program.

3.2 *Contents*. A mixed multiple choice and short answer exam based on the Department's curriculum map (see Appendix A) as well as exams and quizzes from various core courses in the program.

3.3. *Implementation*. The Department will publish a study guide along with sample questions on the Department's website. Students need to take the PKT once they have completed 22 or more credit hours in the program (all four required 100-level courses plus two history classes and two topics classes). It is the responsibility of the Department Lead Advisor to monitor credit hour accumulation and to determine when a student should take the PKT, which is administered by the student's faculty advisor. Test results will be discussed during a 30-min meeting between the student and his or her faculty advisor, who will also make recommendations as to further student progress and success.

Faculty who administered a PKT and discussed results with students fill a feedback form (see Appendix D) and submit it to the DAC within a week. The DAC will then evaluate student scores and faculty feedback during its spring meeting and then forward a summary of its findings and a bullet list with talking points and recommendations to the Department Chairperson for inclusion to the agenda of the annual Department Fall Retreat.

4. Churchill Scholarship / Best Essay Contest

4.1 *Function*. To assess top of the cream
        • writing skills,
        • language comprehension skills, and
        • contextual/applied CT skills;
to provide an incentive for students to show their best efforts when they work on a writing assignments and to send a strong signal to them as to how much we value writing, language, and CT skills; to provide our best students with the opportunity to engage in undergraduate research and to add a not unimportant line to their resume.

4.2 *Implementation*. At the beginning of each spring term, faculty who taught a 300-level or higher course during the past calendar year may submit to the DAC what they think is the best essay they have graded during that period along with, if they wish to do so, a short statement why the essay stands clearly above the rest.

The DAC meets early in February to review the submissions using a rubrics sheet (see Appendix E) and to identify a winner. The winner of the Best Essay Contest will then be awarded the Churchill Scholarship Award at the COAS Honors Banquet.

5. General Education Assessment

5.1 *Function.* To asses the quality and the impact of the Department's contribution to IPFW's General Education Program and the Baccalaureate Framework.

5.2 *Contents*. tbd.

5.3 *Implementation*. The basic approach is to cycle through all X tools once in X years.

Appendix A:

– Department of Philosophy Curriculum Map –

Appendix B:

– Student Portfolio Rubrics Sheet –

Appendix C:

– CTT Feedback Form –

Appendix D:

– PKT Feedback Form –

Appendix E:

– Best Essay Contest Rubrics Sheet –