MEMORANDUM

Date: Friday, June 9th, 2006
To: Marianne Robins, Program Review Committee
Cc: David Vander Laan & Chris Callaway
From: Jim Taylor
RE: Philosophy Department Program Review Progress Report

The following is the philosophy department’s annual assessment update. In this memo, I will (1) summarize the program goals that we formulated and adopted as reported in our “Philosophy Department Program Review Assessment Plan” memo to the Program Review Committee of January 28th, 2004; (2) summarize the assessment methods we have employed and the data we have collected on the basis of our use of these strategies; (3) explain how we collectively interpreted the results of each of our individual assessments; (4) report what we decided about how we will use the results of our assessments; and (5) describe the next steps we will take toward the development of revised goals and refined assessment strategies.

In addition, in this memo I reply to the four requests made by our assessment coordinator Marianne Robins in her memo to me of February 28th, 2006 (which consists in feedback to the philosophy department based on her reading of our assessment report of Friday, January 25th, 2006). These four requests are (1) to provide documents that specifically clarify the two program goals on which we are currently working; (2) to formulate at least one benchmark we will employ to assess our progress toward achieving these two goals; (3) to communicate specifically about the nature and location of the evidence we have of student progress toward the satisfaction of our learning outcome goals; and (4) to indicate what our meeting schedule has been this last semester as we have discussed our program review process.

1. **Review of Program Goals.** The philosophy department’s goals for program assessment are focused on our department’s contribution to the new GE program. Our role in the new GE program involves three major areas of our program: (a) our “Common Context” philosophy course, (b) our “Reasoning Abstractly” courses, and (c) a required Senior Seminar philosophy major course that will enable our majors to satisfy two new GE requirements: (i) a writing-intensive course in the major and (ii) integration of the major discipline. Our departmental goals concern these three areas of our program. Moreover, the college-wide goals we have
chosen to emphasize at the present time fit with our departmental goals. Our first two departmental goals (and the college-wide goals that correspond to them) focus primarily on all Westmont students who take philosophy courses to satisfy GE requirements. Our third departmental goal (and the college-wide goals that correspond to it) has to do primarily with philosophy majors.

Since we have not yet begun to teach the senior seminar course, we are currently focusing only on the two program review goals that are related to GE areas (a) and (b) as defined in the previous paragraph. The reader should keep this in mind while reading the following summary of our goals. I have highlighted our currently active goals with bold font and put the inactive goal in parentheses to emphasize this. After stating the goals in summary form, I will point the reader to a supplementary document that we formulated this semester to use in subsequent semesters in order to clarify specifically for our students (and for the Program Review Committee) what we mean by these goals more determinately.

a. Departmental goals:

i. Students who take “Philosophical Perspectives,” the philosophy department’s “Common Context” GE course, will be able to articulate (at the end of the course) what the contribution of philosophy is to their Christian liberal arts education.

ii. Students who take a philosophy course to satisfy the “Reasoning Abstractly” GE requirement will demonstrate increased facility with abstract philosophical reasoning.

iii. (Philosophy majors who take the new Senior Seminar course required for all philosophy majors will demonstrate (a) conformity with the formal standards for a good philosophical essay and (b) ability to integrate philosophical learning with Christian faith and anticipated post-graduation living.)

b. College-wide goals

i. Christian Orientation Standard Goal: Our first and third departmental goals involve student demonstration of the ability to articulate the contribution of philosophy to the construction of a Christian worldview. In both cases, students will be required to show that they understand how to use philosophical tools in the integration of liberal learning and biblical and theological knowledge. This will require students to show familiarity with scripture, Christian doctrine, etc. as specified by student learning outcome A1 in this standard.
ii. **Critical-Interdisciplinary Thinking Standard Goal:** All three of our departmental goals involve student employment of critical-interdisciplinary thinking, though in different specific ways. This pervasive role for critical thinking is to be expected, since this form of reasoning is at the heart of philosophical method.

iii. **(Written and Oral Communication Standard Goal):** Though all of our courses involve the writing of essays and philosophical conversation, these two types of activities will be especially emphasized in our new Senior Seminar course. One of the main goals of this new course required for philosophy majors is to provide opportunity for, instruction about, and evaluation of extensive philosophical writing. Moreover, class sessions will emphasize ongoing philosophical conversation.

In sum, our assessment plan outlines three departmental student goals and three college-wide student goals together with specific assessment strategies we planned to adopt for each goal so that we could gather evidence of student learning relative to our desired outcomes. As indicated above, some of these goals involve courses we are currently teaching and some have to do with a senior seminar course that we will not be introducing into our curriculum until the spring semester of 2008 (since it is designed for senior philosophy majors who are under the new GE program).

Please refer to Appendix A, entitled “Philosophy Department Program Review Goal Definitions” for specific definitions of the concepts of “a worldview,” “philosophy,” “a Christian liberal arts education,” and “abstract (philosophical) reasoning.” We will be providing this document to our students starting next semester to help them to have a better idea about what our student learning outcome goals mean.

Last fall semester we implemented new assessment strategies to evaluate our progress toward the first two of our three departmental student goals and the first two of our three college-wide student goals. All of these goals have to do with our Philosophical Perspectives GE Common Context courses (there were three sections of this course in the fall semester and five sections of this course in the spring semester) and our GE Common Inquiries Reasoning Abstractly courses (Christian Apologetics, Ancient & Medieval Philosophy, Modern & Contemporary Philosophy, and Critical Reasoning & Logic).

2. **Data.**

   a. **Philosophical Perspectives.** Our student goals in Philosophical Perspectives are that students who take this course “will be able to articulate (at the end of the course) what the contribution of philosophy is to their Christian liberal arts education” (departmental student goal) and will demonstrate their “ability to articulate the contribution of philosophy to the construction of a Christian worldview” (college-
Each semester of this year the three of us employed different strategies to assess student achievement of these goals. Here is a brief summary of the three different approaches we took in the fall semester:

i. **Chris Callaway** chose to achieve the *departmental goal* by means of two assessment strategies: (1) He had his students read an essay that reflected on the nature of a liberal arts education (Michael Oakeshott’s “The Idea of a University” and then facilitated an in-class conversation about the essay. Chris reported back to us at our department meeting of January 3rd that during the discussion the students seemed to show a good grasp of the central ideas of the essay, and they zeroed in on the distinction Oakeshott draws between a “proper” (liberal arts), university education and the kind of education that consists of skills-acquisition in preparation for a job. They also spent considerable time discussing Oakeshott’s claim that a university does not and should not have a purpose or mission. They related their discussion of that claim to education at Westmont. (2) Twenty-two of his students (almost exactly two-thirds of the class) wrote a brief extra-credit essay in which they described encountering a philosophical idea or issue in one of their other classes. The assigned grade reflected their understanding of a philosophical issue (and what counts as a philosophical issue) as well as their writing. Chris reported that the students wrote about a wide range of philosophical issues, and that the mediocre and good papers successfully identified a philosophical issue in a different class, the better ones used philosophical terms and concepts in explaining these issues, and among the weaker ones, nearly everyone failed to identify a genuinely philosophical issue (instead they tended to discuss a theological issue or personal spirituality). Chris’s strategy for achieving the *college-wide student goal* in this course was to have his students read an article on the value of philosophy by Christian philosopher Jacques Maritain and to write an essay on this same topic. Chris evaluated these student essays in terms of (a) the students’ grasp of the topic, (b) the quality of their argumentation, and (c) the quality of their writing.

ii. **Jim Taylor** used the “pre-test/post-test” strategy. He shared at our January 3rd department meeting that about a third of the way into the semester, he had his students read an essay he had written on three tensions that characterize a Christian liberal arts education and how these tensions might be resolved. Then he led the students in an in-class discussion of the issues raised by the essay. The students showed a high degree of comprehension of and appreciation for the issues. After the discussion, the students wrote essays in class in response to the following two questions: (a) what is the contribution...
of philosophy to a Christian liberal arts education? and (b) what is the contribution of philosophy to the construction of a Christian worldview? The students’ essays on the first question were intended to be an indication of their initial thinking relative to the departmental goal for this course and the students’ essays on the second question were aimed at revealing their baseline ideas with respect to the college-wide goal for this course. Jim assessed these “pre-test” essays in terms of the number and quality of relevant substantive student observations about these two roles of philosophy. He deemed an observation adequate as long as it demonstrated a good understanding of the nature of philosophy, the nature of a Christian liberal arts education, and the nature of a Christian worldview. During the last week of the course, Jim handed the students’ essays back to them and gave them an opportunity in class to read their own essays and to write another essay commenting on them in light of the following question: Do you still agree with what you wrote? If so, why? If not, why not? If you think that you need to add something you left out or affirm something you denied (or deny something you affirmed) what would it be and why? Jim evaluated these essays in terms of the reasons given for the conclusions drawn. Jim reported that all the students showed at least an adequate understanding of the natures of philosophy and the Christian liberal arts and the connection between them in their first essay and that around half of the students indicated a change of mind or further learning about these things on their second essay. About a third of the class made especially insightful comments.

iii. David Vander Laan reported at our January 3rd meeting that several times during the semester, his Philosophical Perspectives class specifically discussed the nature of the liberal arts, the role of various disciplines (including philosophy) in the liberal arts, and the connection between liberal arts and the idea of vocation. The assigned readings for the days given to these discussions were “Plato’s Allegory of the Cave” (section 1.2 of Lawhead’s The Philosophical Journey) and “Vocation in the Kingdom of God” (chapter 5 of Plantinga’s Engaging God’s World). (At a number of other points in the semester, they touched on these themes more briefly, especially in the sections of the course on the nature of philosophy and epistemology.) In their final exam, students were asked to explicate the relationship between the liberal arts and the notion of vocation as conceived by Plantinga. David said that the students averaged 9.36 out of 10 on that exam question.

As for the spring semester, the reader should refer to Appendices B, C, & D which contain individual reports from the three of us of our spring semester
assessment methods, data/evidence/results, and interpretation and planned use of the results. These documents also contain the benchmarks we will be employing next semester to measure our progress toward our goals. We began to discuss these individual reports at a recent department meeting. We plan to meet as a department twice in August (precise meeting times are yet to be determined) to continue this group discussion and to use the outcome of our conversation to revise our courses and assessment methods as necessary.

b. **Reasoning Abstractly Courses.** Our student goal in these GE courses is that students demonstrate increased facility with abstract philosophical reasoning. We taught two of these courses in the fall semester: Christian Apologetics (Taylor) and Ancient and Medieval Philosophy (Vander Laan). Here is a record of our conversation about the fall semester:

i. Jim Taylor reported at our January 3rd department meeting that in the first week of his Christian Apologetics class, he distributed to his class a passage from a philosophical essay that contained a philosophical argument. He then told the students to read the essay silently in class and to take time to try to discern (a) the conclusion of the argument (that for which the author was arguing) and (b) the premises of the argument (that by means of which the author was arguing for his conclusion). The passage was relatively brief (only a paragraph) and the argument contained in it was moderately difficult to discern. Students were given 20 minutes to write the argument down in standard form (premises listed first and then the conclusion). This in-class exercise served as a pre-test. On the last day of classes, Jim gave his students in this class another excerpt from a philosophical essay that contained a philosophical argument. This passage was a bit longer, but the argument it contained was about the same length and of a roughly equivalent degree of difficulty. He gave the students 20 minutes to formulate the argument contained in that passage in standard form as well. This in-class exercise served as a post-test. Both pre-test and post-test were evaluated in terms of the students’ ability to recognize and articulate the arguments (premises and conclusions). Jim said that about half the students were able to discern the argument in the pre-test (some more accurately and thoroughly than others) and the other half missed the mark completely. On the post-test, around three-fourths of the students were able to recognize and articulate the argument (again, some more thoroughly and accurately than others) and one-fourth of the students were not.

ii. David Vander Laan reported at our January 3rd department meeting that early in the semester the students in his Ancient and Medieval Philosophy course were asked to analyze an argument by Zeno, and later they were asked to
analyze an argument by Augustine. In each case students were asked to write a well-crafted version of the argument which made clear the premises, conclusion, and inferences. Students were also asked to give a critique of the argument. David added that, naturally, over the course of the semester they discussed many arguments, sometimes presenting well-crafted versions and analyzing them in detail, and other times analyzing them less formally. He said that the students averaged a score of 90.4 on the first argument analysis question and 88.6 on the second (discounting the scores of zero for those who skipped the latter).

As for the spring semester Reasoning Abstractly courses, the reader should refer to Appendices B, C, & D which contain individual reports from the three of us of our spring semester assessment methods, data/evidence/results, and interpretation and planned use of the results. These documents also contain the benchmarks we will be employing next semester to measure our progress toward our goals. The Reasoning Abstractly courses we taught in the spring are Christian Apologetics (Taylor), Modern and Contemporary Philosophy (Callaway), and Critical Reasoning and Logic (Vander Laan).

Please see Appendix E for a table that records the physical evidence we have collected in the form of student papers, quizzes, exams, essays, scores, etc. The data from Callaway and Taylor is located in Taylor’s office and Vander Laan’s data is located in his office.

3. **Group Interpretation of the Fall Results.**

   a. In our discussion at our January 3rd, 2006 meeting and in subsequent reflections leading up to our program review report of January 25th, 2006, we arrived at the following interpretative conclusions concerning our fall assessment strategies in these GE courses and the results of our implementation of these strategies. The bold italicized comments reflect the actions we took this past (spring) semester to address these concerns (Please see Appendix F for a record of our departmental program review meetings during the spring 2006 semester).

   i. We need to be clearer and more precise in our communications with our students about what is expected of them in their performance on these instruments and how we will evaluate them. **In our spring program review assessment meetings, we addressed these concerns by developing specific definitions of the central concepts of our learning goals and by formulating benchmarks. See the appropriate appendices for details.**
ii. We need to give more time to the processing of the relevant content by means of in-class discussion. *Each of us made a concerted effort to do this in each of our relevant courses this semester.*

iii. We need to have further discussions about the possibility of making our assessment instruments more uniform (e.g., using the same articles and the same sorts of assessment tools) so that we can have a better basis on which to compare results from one class to another. *We have not yet been able to have these conversations. We will make this issue a priority for our program review meetings next semester.*

iv. Though we have good reasons for thinking that our students are learning *in general* what we want them to learn about philosophy and the Christian liberal arts in *Philosophical Perspectives* and about good abstract philosophical reasoning in the *Reasoning Abstractly* courses, we need to find ways to make our goals more specific, our instruments more specific, and our evaluations more specific so that we can come to more specific conclusions about what our students are learning and so that we can be in a good position to formulate more specific subsequent plans for future instruction and assessment on the basis of what we have learned about student learning and about our progress toward our instructional goals. *We are hoping that our specific definitions and benchmarks will effectively address these concerns when we begin employing them in our relevant courses in the fall semester. Our fall department program review discussions will involve an evaluation of this implementation and we will report our evaluation in our next program review report.*

4. **Using the Results.** (Again, the bold italicized comments reflect the results of our spring semester conversations and actions.)

a. For *Philosophical Perspectives*, we need to identify as a department a list of key ideas about philosophy and the Christian liberal arts that we will all attempt to communicate to our students and that our assessment instruments will be designed to emphasize. We already have a document that we use as a blueprint for topics that should be covered in this course, and we need to add to this document more specific points about philosophy, the Christian liberal arts, and the relationship between the two. *Please see Appendix A.*

b. We have decided to collaborate on the preparation of thorough instructions on how to write a well-crafted argument, to be included as an appendix to all *Reasoning Abstractly* course syllabi. The appendix will include what students of Critical Reasoning and Logic will have learned about writing well-crafted arguments, along
with some explanation of how this helps us analyze arguments. **We have not yet completed this document. This will be another agenda item for our program review meetings in the fall.**

c. We will also work toward more specificity in goals, instruments, evaluations, inputs, and communications in all of the courses for which we have adopted program review goals. **Please see Appendices A, B, C, & D.**

d. We have samples of student essays and argument analyses on file in the philosophy department. We would be happy to make them available on request. **See Appendix E for a table that summarizes these by professor, course, item, and quantity.**

5. **Next Steps.**

   a. **Change in philosophy department personnel.** Our new colleague Mark Nelson will be joining us this fall. Consequently, an important program review goal for us will be to educate him as quickly and completely as possible about our assessment goals, assessment methods, benchmarks, etc. Chris Callaway will continue to teach for us on a part-time basis (though he will be working full time in the spring to fill in for me while I am on sabbatical).

   b. **Change in philosophy department leadership.** David Vander Laan will be the philosophy department chair next year. So he will be responsible for overseeing the program review process by initiating meetings, submitting reports, and communicating with our program review coordinator, Marianne Robins. Since he will be on sabbatical the following year, I anticipate becoming department chair again at that point.

   c. **Schedule of upcoming meetings.** We will not be able to meet as a department this summer to discuss program review until the week of August 20th. At that point, we will have at least one meeting to discuss changes to our courses that will be reflected in our course syllabi. After that, we will devote as many of our Tuesday lunch meetings as possible to program review issues.

   d. **Items for next year’s agenda.** The topics we will need to discuss next year include the following (some of which were mentioned above in previous sections of this memo):

   i. Group discussion of individual spring assessment results as summarized in appendices B, C, & D

   ii. Informing of Mark Nelson about our program review process
iii. Conversations about whether to make our assessment strategies more uniform and if so, how (see 3, a, iii above).

iv. Evaluation of the use of our new definitions (Appendix A) and benchmarks (Appendices B, C, & D).

v. Formulation of a document outlining instructions for preparing a well-crafted argument (for use in our Reasoning Abstractly courses – see 4, b above).
APPENDIX A

“Philosophy Department Program Review Goal Definitions”

This document explains two departmental goals for student learning in classes that fulfill the General Education requirements 1) Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value and 2) Reasoning Abstractly.

1) Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value

PHI 006 (Philosophical Perspectives) is the primary course satisfying the GE requirement Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value. One departmental goal for PHI 006 is that students will be able to articulate the role of philosophy in their Christian liberal arts education and in their construction of a Christian worldview. Students should be able to describe what a worldview, a liberal arts education, and philosophy are, and in what ways these might be distinctively Christian; and students should be able to express how these are or might be related. One set of descriptions and relationships is outlined here.

A worldview is a set of answers to the fundamental questions of human life and the character of the world. They include:
- What can I know?
- What is the nature of reality?
- What sort of being am I?
- What is life about?

However, a worldview is not simply a collection of dogmatic assertions, but a framework for conducting further inquiry, a set of guiding assumptions that provide grounds for testing new ideas and beliefs. The elements of a worldview themselves are subjects of inquiry, too.

The Christian faith is not itself a worldview, but it does involve answers to the questions mentioned above, and so it may be said to contain or express a worldview. One subsidiary goal, therefore, is to have students express Christian perspectives on philosophical issues such as:
- To what extent are human beings free?
- What is the relation between mind and body?
- What is involved with living well?
- What is the epistemic status of Christian belief?

In most such cases, a range of answers has been offered from various Christian perspectives; the challenge of finding the truth is part of what we hope students will understand about the relationship between human reasoning and Christian faith.

Philosophy is a rational and critical attempt to shape one’s worldview. As such it crucially involves the use of arguments in attempting to answer questions like the above. Though the historical discipline of philosophy is complex and difficult to define precisely, we might say philosophy is thinking hard about big questions.
A liberal arts education is an education that a) is both general and humane and b) values truth and reason. Liberal learning is humane in that it involves the cultivation of the whole human being (skills, virtues, attitudes, etc.). It is general in that it involves the pursuit of all truth, the cultivation of complete goodness, and the production and appreciation of genuine beauty. Insofar as a liberal arts education is dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, it also employs the method of reasoning for the purpose of acquiring the truth.

Christian liberal learning is liberal learning from the standpoint of Christian conviction and commitment. The addition of a Christian perspective can complete, ground, correct, and direct liberal learning. A Christian perspective completes liberal learning by including the discipline of theology, which, from a Christian perspective, has the highest object of all and illuminates all other disciplines. A Christian perspective grounds liberal learning by providing a provisional standpoint from which to engage other disciplines; as in the Augustinian motto, it is “faith seeking understanding.” A Christian perspective corrects liberal learning in some of those cases where the disciplines err, as when a naturalistic perspective reduces the significance of human love to a genetically adaptive mechanism; however, A Christian perspective requires humility and openness to the possibility that one’s theological convictions themselves need to be corrected. Finally, Christian theology directs liberal learning to what is most valuable from an eternal perspective: knowing, loving, and serving God.

Philosophy is naturally suited to a liberal arts education both in that it is a reasoned attempt to come to the truth and in that it addresses the broadest range of human concerns. It includes general questions not systematically addressed by other disciplines, but also includes interdisciplinary and foundational questions raised by other disciplines.

The role of philosophy in human life is, from a Christian perspective or any other, itself philosophically disputable. A Christian perspective does not straightforwardly determine any single view about the nature of reason or its role in human life. With most Christian thinkers, however, we affirm the value of reason as one of God’s gifts and an aspect of the divine image humans bear. We also affirm human limitations and the need for divine self-revelation.

2) Reasoning Abstractly

Our primary goal for the Reasoning Abstractly component of the GE curriculum is to enable students to develop the skills involved in reasoning well. The Reasoning Abstractly courses also have knowledge-oriented goals, but this portion of the GE curriculum targets reasoning skills. Chief among these are:

- distinguishing arguments from non-arguments
- recognizing premises, conclusions, and the relationships between them
- identifying the forms of arguments
- identifying and understanding fallacies
- constructing strong and valid arguments
Assignments for Reasoning Abstractly courses are specifically designed to give students practice in exercising these skills (though not every one of them in each of the Reasoning Abstractly courses).

PHI 012 (Critical Reasoning & Logic) is dedicated to the challenge of reasoning well, and so provides practice with a relatively wide range of reasoning skills, including both composing formal proofs and diagnosing fallacies in ordinary language. PHI 101 (Ancient & Medieval Philosophy) and PHI 102 (Modern & Contemporary Philosophy) develop reasoning skills in the context of the history of philosophy. Generally these classes reconstruct and analyze historical philosophical arguments. RS 103 (Christian Apologetics) provides students with opportunities to develop abstract reasoning skills for the purpose of defending the truth claims of the Christian faith.
APPENDIX B

Chris Callaway’s Spring 2006 Report of Goals, Assessment Methods, Results, Interpretation, and Benchmarks (Benchmarks can be found at the end of this appendix)

I. Departmental Goals

Student Goal 1: Articulating the contribution of philosophy to Christian Liberal Arts education (PHI 006: Philosophical Perspectives)

Assessment Methods:

1. The first of my proposed assessment methods for this goal was having students read an essay that reflected on the nature of liberal arts education and use this essay as the basis for class discussion. The essay I assigned was “The Idea of a University” by Michael Oakeshott.

2. Students wrote a brief essay in which they described encountering a philosophical idea or issue in one of their other classes. The essay counted as one essay question on their final exam (i.e., 1/3 of the final exam grade), and the assigned grade reflected their understanding of a philosophical issue—and what counts as a philosophical issue—as well as (to a lesser extent) their writing.

Results:

1. The students seemed to have a weaker grasp of the material. I gave the final quiz of the semester on the Oakeshott reading, and grades were down (4.8 out of 10). In class discussion, the students seemed to understand the distinction between Oakeshott’s notion of a “proper” college education and skills acquisition, and raised thoughtful questions about Oakeshott’s preference for the former. Nevertheless, they seemed a bit less engaged with the essay (and the discussion) than students in the section I taught in Fall 2005. I suspect end-of-the-year fatigue may be partly to blame.

2. The class average for this assignment was 84.82. There also seemed to be a greater variety of disciplines discussed than the previous semester; this term’s students wrote on Rhetoric, Psychology, Sociology, New Testament, Calculus, Economics, History, Spanish Literature, Christian Doctrine, New Religious Movements, Empirical Political Research, Communication Studies, Abnormal Psychology, and others. The most encouraging result is that the weaker submissions were still far better than the weak submissions from the Fall term, perhaps because the assignment is now required (rather than extra credit). There were only four submissions that I thought failed to recognize a philosophically significant issue.

Student Goal 2: Improvement in abstract reasoning

Assessment Tool: Students take a pre-test and a post-test in which they recognize, evaluate, and construct philosophical arguments. On each test, students were given an excerpt drawn from
popular sources. They received up to two points for their recognition of the excerpt’s argument(s) and up to two points for their evaluation of the author’s reasoning.

**Results:** On the pre-test, 18 students received a combined 37 points, for a class average of 2.06. On the post-test, 18 students received a combined 59 points, for a class average of 3.28. Hence, they showed an improvement of 59% in their abstract reasoning skills.

**II. College-wide Goals**

*Christian Orientation Standard Goal:* The integration of learning and the Christian faith (PHI 006: Philosophical Perspectives)

**Assessment Tools:**

1. Students wrote an essay on the value of philosophy. They were graded based on three criteria: (a) their grasp of an article on this topic by Jacques Maritain (“The Philosopher in Society”); (b) the quality of their argumentation; and (c) the quality of their writing.
2. The methods used in Student Goal 1 discussed above also served this goal.

**Results:**

1. Performance on this assignment was significantly weaker than in previous classes. The class average was 79.83 for this semester; last semester’s average was 86.74. The highest grade this semester was B+. The most prevalent problem I detected (apart from writing weaknesses) was a lack of original thought. Many students slavishly followed the opinions of Maritain, some hardly even amplifying his meaning. I think students this semester did not take the assignment as seriously as I had hoped. Last term, I had a dozen or so students meet with me about their papers before the deadline; this semester I had only two. In reference to the Christian Orientation Goal, I should note that fewer students than in semesters past had substantive discussion of the relation between philosophy and Christianity.

**III. Response to Assessment**

1. The results of the pre-test/post-test comparison are perhaps misleading due to the difficulty and clarity of the excerpts chosen. Something should probably be done about this.
2. In the exercise in which Perspectives students write about an encounter with a philosophical issue, it might help to give students a prompt about what sorts of things count as philosophical issues (i.e., a few examples might help get them thinking).
IV. Assessment Benchmarks

*Philosophical Perspectives*

Goal: Articulating the contribution of philosophy to Christian Liberal Arts education

Assessment tool: Students write a brief essay in which they describe an encounter with a philosophical issue in another class (i.e., one not offered by the Philosophy Department).

Benchmark: 90% of students will accurately discern a genuine philosophical issue.

*Modern & Contemporary Philosophy*

Goal: Improvement in abstract reasoning

Assessment tool: Students take a pre-test and post-test in which they reconstruct and evaluate arguments. Each test is graded on a four-point scale—two points for their reconstruction of the argument and two points for their evaluation.

Benchmark: Students will show an improvement of 15% between the pre-test and the post-test.
APPENDIX C

Jim Taylor’s Spring 2006 Report of Goals, Assessment Methods, Results, Interpretation, and Benchmarks

PHI 006 (Philosophical Perspectives)

Benchmark: The benchmark I’ve chosen for the Philosophical Perspectives goal (“Students will be able to articulate the role of philosophy in their Christian liberal arts education and in their construction of a Christian worldview”) is that at least eighty percent of the student essays on the role of philosophy in a Christian liberal arts education and the construction of a Christian worldview demonstrate a very good to excellent grasp of the concepts of “worldview,” “philosophy,” and “Christian liberal arts education” (as defined in the document in Appendix A of this memo).

Spring Results: This past (spring 2006) semester, I had the 23 students in my honors section of Philosophical Perspectives write an essay on the following essay prompt:

“What is (can be, ought to be) the contribution of philosophy to your Christian liberal arts education and to your construction of a Christian worldview? Be sure to refer to a number of philosophers and to their philosophical ideas and arguments in answering this question.”

In advance of the exam, I had my students read an essay I wrote entitled “Jerusalem, Athens, and Westmont College,” in which I discuss the contribution of philosophy to a Christian liberal arts education and the formation of a Christian worldview in connection with three tensions between the classical liberal arts ideal and the Christian faith (our department had not yet formulated the definitions document included in Appendix A of this memo which we will be giving our Perspectives students starting this fall). The scores on these exams ranged from a low of 81 (B-) to a high of 97 (A+). The average score was 89.7. So in this case, all of the students in the class demonstrated a very good to excellent grasp of the relevant concepts. However, this was an honors class, so that is why the benchmark I have chosen to begin employing in this course in the fall specifies the goal that at least 80% of the students will write essays that demonstrate this level of quality.

Evidence: The bluebooks in which these essays are written are on file in my office (see Appendix E for details).

Next steps: At our first August department meeting devoted to a discussion of our spring semester 2006 individual program review assessment results, I will share my results and invite discussion about how the incorporation of the new definitions document can best be employed in preparing students to do well on this essay assignment in my Philosophical Perspectives courses.
Benchmark: The benchmark for this goal (“Students will demonstrate an increased facility with abstract, philosophical reasoning”) will be that, by the end of the semester, **eighty percent of the tested students demonstrate skill in argument recognition and analysis by exhibiting (a) an ability to identify the conclusion of an argument in a passage containing an argument and (b) an ability to identify the premises that support the conclusion of this argument in the same passage.**

For a detailed description and explanation of this test, please see section 2, b, i above.

Results: In the fall semester, as explained above in section 2, b, i, I used a pre-test and a post-test to test student argument recognition and analysis skills. As reported above, 50% of the students were successful on the pre-test and 75% were successful on the post-test. In my spring Reasoning Abstractly course (RS 103), I experimented by having only a test of this sort at the end of the semester rather than having a pre-test at the beginning of the semester and a post-test at the end. On that spring test, only around 60% of the students were able correctly to identify the conclusion and premises of the argument contained in the passage.

Evidence: These tests are on file in my office (see Appendix E for details).

Next steps: When we meet as a department in August to discuss, interpret, and evaluate our individual course results, I will share with my colleagues that I have decided to reinstate the pre-test at the beginning of the semester. The reason for this is that when I had the pre-test, 75% of the students were successful on the post-test and when I did not have the pre-test, only 60% of the students were successful. I believe that with a pre-test and with the more specific definitions of the concepts involved in the Reasoning Abstractly goal that we will provide students, that I will be able to increase the success rate to 80% (as stated in the benchmark above.)
APPENDIX D

David Vander Laan’s Spring 2006 Report of Goals, Assessment Methods, Results, Interpretation, and Benchmarks

Benchmarks for Departmental Goals, Evidence, and Plans for the Future
David Vander Laan, June 2006

PHI 006 (Philosophical Perspectives)

Benchmark: The benchmark I’ve chosen for the Philosophical Perspectives goal (“Students will be able to articulate the role of philosophy in their Christian liberal arts education and in their construction of a Christian worldview”) is that ninety percent of the tested students receive a score of 8 or above (out of 10) on a designated question of the oral final exam.

The question will be based on lecture and discussion and on a reading from Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.’s Engaging God’s World. Because of the oral format, not every student will answer the same question, but each will answer a question on the same theme. For example:

- What does the notion of vocation have to do with the meaning of life?
- What does Cornelius Plantinga mean by saying each of us has a kingdom?
- How does Plantinga’s view of vocation relate to the project of a liberal arts college?

These questions give students opportunity to demonstrate their ability to articulate their knowledge of the interrelationships between philosophical questions (particularly about vocation and the meaning of life) and the Christian liberal arts.

This past semester (spring 2006), nearly all students tested scored 8 or better on one of these questions, for a class average of 8.94. This score is a bit lower than last semester, but is still relatively high. The difference seemed to be due mainly to a couple students’ complete inability to answer the question this semester.

Evidence: I keep records of individual students’ oral exams in my file cabinet, usually until the next semester is well underway.

Plans: Students seem to be doing very well with respect to this goal. My plan for next spring (the next time I’ll teach PHI 006) is to broaden the range of test questions to reflect more of what the departmental goal aims at.

PHI 012 (Critical Reasoning and Logic)

Benchmark: The benchmark for this goal (“Students will demonstrate an increased facility with abstract, philosophical reasoning”) will be that sixty percent of the tested students score 80% or better on the final exam. The final exam is comprehensive and requires students to demonstrate facility with all the skills that have been practiced during the semester, sometimes without the contextual clues that suggest a method when the techniques were first introduced.

This past semester (spring 2006), only forty percent of students (6 out of 15) scored 80% or better on the final. This is pretty consistent with scores in 2005. In 2004, seventy five percent of the students scored 80% or better on the final.
Evidence: Final exams are kept on a shelf inside the built-in cabinet in my office for about a year.

Plans: Students have not been meeting this benchmark consistently. It looks as if class composition makes a significant difference; one student population can do considerably better than another. Another factor is presumably the amount of practice students get with formal logic in the later parts of the semester (when our focus is on informal reasoning). I plan to integrate more formal proofs into the assignment structure of the latter half of the semester. I also plan to discuss with the department our goals for the logic curriculum and whether they would be better served by a difference balance of formal and informal material or two courses rather than one.

APPENDIX E

Summary of Available Evidence by Professor, Course, Item, and Quantity
(the Callaway and Taylor items are stored in Taylor’s office and the Vander Laan items are stored in Vander Laan’s office)

Fall 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Callaway</td>
<td>PHI 6</td>
<td>Best “value of philosophy” essays</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callaway</td>
<td>PHI 6</td>
<td>Extra credit essay on philosophical issue in other course</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>PHI 6</td>
<td>Initial “Philosophy &amp; Christian Liberal Arts” Essays</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>PHI 6</td>
<td>Final “Philosophy &amp; Christian Liberal Arts” Essays</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>RS 103</td>
<td>Argument recognition and analysis pre-test</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Course</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Quantity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>RS 103</td>
<td>Argument recognition and analysis post-test</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vander Laan</td>
<td>PHI 6</td>
<td>Final exam question on philosophy and the Christian liberal arts</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vander Laan</td>
<td>PHI 101</td>
<td>Argument analysis exercises</td>
<td>21</td>
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</table>

**Spring 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Callaway</td>
<td>PHI 6</td>
<td>“Idea of University” Quiz</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callaway</td>
<td>PHI 6</td>
<td>Best essays on philosophical issue in other course</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callaway</td>
<td>PHI 102</td>
<td>Argument reconstruction and evaluation pre-test</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callaway</td>
<td>PHI 102</td>
<td>Argument reconstruction and evaluation post-test</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>PHI 6</td>
<td>Final exam essay on the contribution of philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>RS 103</td>
<td>Argument analysis exercise</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vander Laan</td>
<td>PHI 6</td>
<td>Final exam question on</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vander Laan</td>
<td>PHI 12</td>
<td>Comprehensive logic final exam</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>philosophy and the Christian liberal arts</td>
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## APPENDIX F

### Schedule of Philosophy Department Program Review Meetings during spring 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Purpose of meeting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 3(^{rd})</td>
<td>Shared and discussed individual course assessment results from relevant fall 2005 courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 25(^{th})</td>
<td>Submitted progress report to Program Review Committee after discussing it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 28(^{th})</td>
<td>Jim Taylor met with assessment coordinator Marianne Robins to discuss the January 25(^{th}) report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 7(^{th})</td>
<td>Engaged in initial discussion of Marianne Robin’s feedback about January 25(^{th}) report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 28(^{th})</td>
<td>Addressed Marianne Robin’s four recommendations in detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 16(^{th})</td>
<td>Jim Taylor met with assessment coordinator Marianne Robins to discuss preparation for June 15(^{th}) report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 30(^{th})</td>
<td>Discussed preparation for June 15(^{th}) report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 6(^{th})</td>
<td>Finalized assignments for June 15(^{th}) report</td>
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