I. Mission Statement, Student Learning Goals and Student Learning Objectives

1. Mission Statement (From the college catalogue; To be revised in the near future): “The Westmont philosophy program is designed to foster the ability to think critically and analytically, communicate clearly and logically, interact with the philosophic tradition, and explore the relationship between philosophy and the Christian faith.”

2. Student Learning Goals. In our departmental program review assessment plan, dated January 28th, 2004, we adopted three student learning goals. The first of these goals involves our Philosophical Perspectives (PHI-006) course, which students can take to fulfill their Philosophical Reflections Common Context GE requirement. The second goal involves the courses we teach by means of which students may satisfy their Reasoning Abstractly Common Inquiries GE requirement. The third goal involves our philosophy major senior seminar, which all of our majors are now required to take in their last spring semester at Westmont (we offered this course for the first time last spring). The first two of these goals were discussed at length throughout the 2007-2008 academic year by two different committees. The first committee consists of the instructors who teach courses that satisfy the Philosophical Reflections requirement and the second committee consists of instructors who teach courses that satisfy the Reasoning Abstractly requirement. As a result of the work of these two committees, our first two goals have been rephrased and the specific student learning objectives under each of these two goals have been reformulated. Also, now that we have offered our Senior Seminar course for the first time, the three of us who will take turns teaching that course will begin to work more
thoroughly on our third goal and the student learning objectives associated with it.

a. **Goal 1**: Students who take a course in the “Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value” Common Context GE area will (at the end of the course) be able to state in basic terms the contribution of philosophical reflection to their Christian liberal arts education.

   i. **Student learning objective 1.1**: (Philosophy) Students will be able to recognize and articulate foundational questions of philosophy – especially foundational questions of particular interest to Christians – though the emphasis among knowing, being, and value will vary by course.

   ii. **Student learning objective 1.2**: (Liberal Arts) Students will be able to articulate some of the main components of a Christian liberal arts education and the interrelation of philosophy and other areas of academic study in the liberal arts, both in terms of content and the development and application of transferable skills.

   iii. **Student learning objective 1.3**: (Worldview) Students will be able to articulate the relationship between philosophical commitments/academic life and their beliefs, feelings, commitments, and practices as components of an integral life, considered as a whole.

b. **Goal 2**: Students who take a course to satisfy the “Reasoning Abstractly” GE requirement (including PHI-12, PHI-101, PHI-102, and RS-103) will demonstrate increased facility with abstract philosophical reasoning.

   i. **Student learning objective 2.1**: (Abstract Reasoning Recognition) Students can identify instances of abstract deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving) and can distinguish premises from conclusions (or their analogues).

   ii. **Student learning objective 2.2**: (Abstract Reasoning Construction) Students can construct an instance of valid deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving).

   iii. **Student learning objective 2.3**: (Abstract Reasoning Evaluation) Students can distinguish valid forms of deductive reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of
arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving) from invalid and/or fallacious forms of reasoning.

II. Data and Interpretation

1. Specific Learning Objectives: Data and Interpretation. Our department has been focusing on the first two of our three student learning goals, and we have been assessing our students to determine the extent of their learning relative to the first specific learning objective under each of these two goals (Objective 1.1 and Objective 2.1). David Vander Laan was on sabbatical for the entire year, so we do not have any data from his classes. We have data from PHI-006 and RS-103 in the fall 2007 semester and from PHI-006 and PHI-102 in the spring 2008 semester.

Fall 2007

Student Learning Goal 1 and PHI-006

Since those of us who were teaching during the fall 2007 and who teach courses satisfying the Philosophical Reflections GE Common Context requirement (Nelson, Taylor, Hoeckley, Crockett, and Covington) met regularly throughout that semester to discuss revising the specific formulation of the three student learning objectives related to our first student learning goal, our assessment of our progress toward the attainment of this goal took place only in my (Taylor’s) section of PHI-006. Also, the assessment tool I used employed only the general language of the goal itself rather than the more specific language of the objectives under this goal.

- **Assessment method:** On December 5th, 2007 (at the end of the semester) I asked my students to write an in-class one-page essay in response to this prompt, “How has philosophy contributed to my Christian liberal arts education?”

- **Data collected:** 43 students wrote essays. Here is a breakdown of the grades I gave to these essays:
  
  - Excellent: 15 (35%)
  - Very Good: 23 (53%)
  - Good: 5 (12%)

  The excellent essays (a) employed an adequate conception of philosophy and (b) mentioned at least one example of a specific application of philosophical thinking to a question raised in another liberal arts discipline. The very good essays addressed (a) or (b) but not both, and the good essays showed some general understanding of the relation of philosophy to the Christian liberal arts in general but did not address either (a) or (b).

- **Location of data:** These essays are located in my office in a file labeled “Philosophy Program Assessment Data.” The essays are handwritten on notebook paper and are
attached together with a paper clip. There is a cover page attached to them that identifies them by semester and course.

- **Collective interpretation of data:** The benchmark I adopted in the spring semester of 2006 for this goal 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 education (as defined in Appendix A of our June 9th, 2006 Program Review Progress Report).” This benchmark was exceeded in this case (88% of the students’ essays received a rating of “excellent” or “very good”). This is an improvement of student performance on a similar exercise in previous semesters. One reason for this is that I provided my students with better definitions of the key terms than the definitions I had given them in previous semesters. In spite of this improvement, it became clear in our Philosophical Reflections assessment meetings that future assessments of student achievement of this goal would need to test students for their attainment of more specific objectives. In response to this input from the committee and to our formulation of more specific student learning objectives, I employed a different assessment tool in the spring semester of 2008 in this course (see below).

**Student Learning Objective 2.1 and RS-103**

- **Assessment method:** On December 5th, 2007 I showed a YouTube video to my RS-103 class that featured a debate between some atheists and some Christians. I gave my students the assignment of identifying and recording at least two arguments employed by these debaters and providing some explanatory comment about the arguments. The students were required to formulate the arguments in “standard form,” listing the premises and the conclusion clearly.

- **Data collected:** Twenty-two students participated in this exercise. I evaluated their argument recognition and construction efforts as follows:

  - Superior: 6 (27%)
  - Good: 9 (41%)
  - Fair: 5 (23%)
  - Poor: 2 (9%)

The superior papers included (a) at least two reconstructed arguments in standard form correctly showing the premises and conclusion of each argument and (b) some commentary explaining the arguments. The good papers included (a) but not (b). The fair papers included only one correctly reconstructed argument. The poor papers showed some general understanding of the argumentation employed but not a reconstruction of an argument in standard form with premises and conclusion indicated.
- **Location of data**: These papers are located in my office in a file labeled “Philosophy Program Assessment Data.” The papers are handwritten on notebook paper and are attached together with a paper clip. There is a cover page attached to them that identifies them by semester and course.

- **Collective interpretation of data**: All of my conversations about our second student learning goal took place last year with instructors of non-philosophy courses satisfying the Reasoning Abstractly GE requirement. I met a number of times with mathematics and computer science faculty to work on the formulation of specific student learning objectives under this goal (see above for the results of our conversations). We also came up with a rubric to use in evaluating student work in this area (see below). I have not yet discussed this data with the members of the philosophy department. Our efforts as a department were directed exclusively at our first student learning goal (discussed above). The members of the Reasoning Abstractly assessment group did experiment with an alternative assessment instrument, but we decided not to employ that tool for official assessment purposes, so I have no data to report from the use of that tool (though I do have copies of my RS-103 students’ responses to that instrument on file in my office).

**Spring 2008**

*Student Learning Objective 1.1 and PHI-006*

Mark Nelson and I were the only ones in the philosophy department to employ assessment tools in our spring 2008 PHI-006 courses to evaluate student progress toward the achievement of student learning objective 1.1 (Jesse Covington of political science and Carter Crockett of economics and business also taught Philosophical Reflections courses and assessed student learning in those courses relative to student learning objective 1.1, but I am not including a discussion of their assessments and results here because they are not members of the philosophy department). Mark’s description of his assessment method and the data he collected on the basis of it is included as an attachment to this report. His raw data are located in his office. I have also attached an account of the method I employed in my spring 2008 honors section of PHI-006, together with a summary of the data I collected. The student essays I evaluated in order to assess their learning relative to student learning objective 1.1 are contained in an electronic file on my laptop and on the Westmont server. They are in a folder entitled “PHI-006H Final Projects Spring 2008.” Our department has not yet had a chance to engage in collective interpretation of either the data from Mark’s assessment or the data from mine since we collected the data at the end of last semester and this semester is just starting. We plan to make a discussion of this data the topic of one of our next department meetings.

*Student Learning Objective 2.2 and PHI-102*

I was the only regular member of the philosophy department to teach a Reasoning Abstractly course in the spring of 2008 (Kevin Sharpe, who taught David Vander Laan’s courses while he was on sabbatical, taught PHI-012). I have attached a memo to this report in which I describe the assessment method I used in this course (PHI-102) to measure
student progress toward the achievement of student learning objective 2.2. The student essays on which this report is based are all in electronic form and are located on both my laptop and on the college server. They are in a folder entitled “PHI-102 Papers Spring 2008.”

2. **Interpretation of the Results.** Our conversations about the results of our fall 2007 assessment methods (and those of previous years) have led us to come to at least the following general conclusions: (a) We need to provide more specific definitions of the key terms in our student learning goals; (b) we need to formulate at least three more specific, measurable student learning objectives under each of our general student goals; (c) we need to agree on a rubric that we can all use in the evaluation of our students’ responses to the administration of our assessment tools (even if we choose to use different specific assessment methods that are suited to our particular courses and course aims); and (d) we need to provide our students with additional resources to help prepare them for success in their performance in these assessment activities. Generally speaking, we have learned that our students need clearer (more specific and precise) definitions, objectives, evaluation criteria, and guidelines.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Goals</th>
<th>Contribution of Philosophy to the Christian Lib. Arts</th>
<th>Abstract Philosophical Reasoning Skills</th>
<th>Senior Seminar: Writing and Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do the Learning Goals mean?</strong></td>
<td>See section I 2 a above.</td>
<td>See section I 2 b above.</td>
<td>1. Can write good philosophical essay. 2. Can integrate philosophy with faith &amp; life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Where are the Learning Outcomes met?</strong></td>
<td>Introduced: PHI-006</td>
<td>Developed: PHI-012 PHI-101 PHI-102 RS-103</td>
<td>Mastered: PHI-195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How are they assessed?</strong></td>
<td>Essay exams In-class essays</td>
<td>Logic exams Arg. analysis exs. Philosophical essays</td>
<td>Philo. Essays Class discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benchmark</strong></td>
<td>At least 80% excellent or very good</td>
<td>At least 80% excellent or very good</td>
<td>To be determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Link to the learning standards</strong></td>
<td>Christ. Orientation Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Christ. Orientation Critical Thinking Written Commun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Using the Results and Next Steps

- As a result of the assessment results in my courses, I have decided to adopt new textbooks in my PHI-006 course. One of these is entitled *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* and the other is called *Engaging God's World*. These resources provide much more material to help students prepare to discuss the contribution of philosophy to their Christian liberal arts education and to their ongoing construction of their own Christian worldview. I have also begun using a book in my Reasoning Abstractly courses entitled *A Rulebook for Arguments*. This booklet provides excellent guidance for students who will need to be able to recognize, construct, and evaluate instances of valid deductive argumentation and reasoning. I used these texts for the first time last spring and during Mayterm, and I plan to share with my colleagues at an upcoming department meeting what I think about their effectiveness in contributing to our students learning and progress toward the achievement of our chosen student learning goals and objectives.

- After our conversations last year about our goals and objectives in our Common Context and Common Inquiries courses, we have all incorporated the results of these conversations into our course materials and we continue to try to make our assessment tools more effective.

- Our departmental assessment goal at this point is to turn our attention toward goals for the philosophy major and to spend less time thinking, talking, and working on the GE goals that have occupied much of our time and attention for the past few years (since the new GE program was approved and implemented). We have two years before our 6-year report is due, and we will be hammering out a specific plan together to make sure that we use those two years wisely in the preparation of that report.

IV. Data For Program Review

I will submit our Faculty Information Sheets later this week.

V. Time-line for completion of the 6 year report

We have a lot to do here. I will submit a Multi-Year Assessment Plan later when we have had a chance to formulate one. We have two years before we need to submit our 6-year Program Review Report on September 15th, 2010. We also need to choose someone to be our principal Program Review Report preparer and submit a proposal for a course release for that person by the deadline this January, 2009. Among the things we need to accomplish are (a) a new mission statement for our department, (b) Four to six philosophy-major-specific student goals and carefully formulated specific student learning objectives for each of these goals, (c) a plan for the assessment of student progress toward the achievement of
these goals, (d) rubrics to use in the evaluation of student performance on the assessment instruments we will employ to measure student progress toward these goals, (e) the construction of the assessment methods themselves for each student learning objective (though perhaps in many cases one instrument can be used for more than one objective), (f) a plan to discuss the results of each administration of these assessment tools with a view to ongoing revision to our courses and program in light of our findings, (g) the gathering of basic statistical information about our program, (h) an account of our use of both financial and other institutional resources for the education of our students, and (i) our long-term vision and goals for our department, program, and major. We have clearly got a lot to do!