The philosophy department’s recent program review conversations have focused on a number of philosophy curricular changes required by the new GE program. These revisions involve 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 we are proposing to provide our majors with a means 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 department goal (and the college-wide goals that correspond to it) has to do primarily with philosophy majors. All the assessment strategies discussed below are new strategies that we have not yet adopted.

I. Departmental goals

   a. Student goal 1: 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.

      i. Assessment strategy for student goal 1: Students in this course will be required to articulate what they believe about the contribution of philosophy to the Christian liberal arts. The specific mode of articulation will be left up to each individual instructor. Examples of such modes include writing a brief (2-page) essay, delivering a brief (5-minute) speech,
and writing an essay on an in-class quiz or exam. These could take the form of a final paper, part of the written final exam or a component of a private oral exam.

1. **Timing of this assessment strategy**: Since we teach at least three sections of this course each semester, this assessment strategy will be administered at least three times at the end of each semester.

2. **Context for this assessment strategy**: This assessment strategy will be carried out in the context of each individual section of “Philosophical Perspectives” at the end of each semester. Course readings, lectures and discussions will provide students with the inputs required for preparing this summative report at the end of the semester.

b. **Student goal 2**: Students who take a philosophy course to satisfy the “Reasoning Abstractly” GE requirement will demonstrate increased facility with abstract philosophical reasoning.

   i. **Assessment strategy for student goal 2**: Students will take a pre-test and a post-test assessing their ability to recognize, evaluate and construct abstract arguments.

      1. **Timing of this assessment strategy**: The pre-test will be administered at the beginning of each reasoning abstractly philosophy course and the post-test will be given at the end of each of these courses.

      2. **Context for this assessment strategy**: The pre-test will be given to students during the first week of the course and it will not be graded. It will consist in philosophical arguments with course-relevant content of varying degrees of quality which the students will be asked to evaluate. It will also provide students with an opportunity to construct an argument for a course-relevant thesis. The post-test will have exactly the same format but will contain different arguments to evaluate and thesis for which to argue. The post-test will be based on material studied in the course and it will be graded. The post-test may be part of the final exam. Students will be given explicit instruction in logic as well as ongoing demonstrations of argument evaluation and construction throughout the course as input to prepare them for the post-test.
c. **Student goal 3**: 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.

i. **Assessment strategy for student goal 3**: At the end of the semester, students will submit a substantial written product that consists in one large essay or a collection of essays loosely organized by an overarching theme.

   1. **Timing of this assessment strategy**: Senior Seminar will be offered once a year during the spring semester. The primary student outcome on which assessment will be based will be the major writing project due at the end of this semester.

   2. **Context for this assessment strategy**: Students will be required to write 3-4 short essays throughout the semester on topics in the general category of worldview construction and philosophy of life. The professor will provide ongoing guidance during the writing process and feedback on the completed essays. At the end of the semester, students will combine these shorter essays into one final written product as described above. Readings and class conversations will emphasize the worldview theme. The primary focus of the course will be on philosophical writing for the purpose of the integration of faith, living and philosophical learning.

II. **College-wide goals**

a. **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.

   i. **Assessment strategy for this goal**: Students in Philosophical Perspectives and students in the philosophy major Senior Seminar will be instructed to draw on their knowledge of the Bible and Christian theology in preparing the written documents (or oral presentations) that will be the basis for our assessment of their satisfaction of departmental goals 1 & 3. Our evaluation of these essays (or speeches) will be based, in part, on the extent and quality of this element of the students’ reports.
1. Timing of this assessment strategy: See the parallel section above in departmental goals 1 & 3.

2. Context for this assessment strategy: See the parallel section above in departmental goals 1 & 3.

b. 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.

   i. Assessment strategies for this goal: Departmental goal 1 requires Philosophical Perspectives students to articulate the use of philosophical tools for the purposes of faith-learning integration and interdisciplinary thinking in their Christian liberal arts coursework. One of the main tools they will need to discuss is that of critical thinking. Departmental goal 2 makes use of tests by means of which we will assess student ability to employ abstract philosophical reasoning. Such reasoning includes both analytic and critical thinking. Finally, though departmental goal 3 emphasizes synthetic and constructive (integrative) reasoning more than analytic and critical thinking, there will be a component of the latter sort of thinking as well, since any good philosophical essay will employ critical thinking.

   1. Timing of this assessment strategy: See the parallel sections above in departmental goals 1, 2 & 3.

   2. Context for this assessment strategy: See the parallel sections above in departmental goals 1, 2 & 3.

c. 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.

   i. Assessment strategies for this goal: As I said above, the main outcome of our Senior Seminar course will be the students’ production of a substantial philosophical writing project. Since this will be among the last of the philosophy courses that our majors will take, we will have very high
expectations of their ability to produce a high quality philosophical essay. Moreover, we will work throughout the semester toward the attainment of this goal. In doing so, we will pay special attention to as many of the specific student learning outcomes listed in this standard as possible.

1. **Timing of this assessment strategy:** See the parallel sections above in departmental goal 3.

2. **Context for this assessment strategy:** See the parallel sections above in departmental goal 3.

**III. Structures for on-going conversation:** Our department meets every Tuesday during lunch for a department meeting (unless one of us has a conflict at that time, in which case we skip our meeting until the following Tuesday lunch). The way in which we have dealt with philosophy program review and assessment recently is to discuss the issues in this category at these lunches. For instance, this past semester we discussed revisions to our curriculum required by the new GE program, our Senior Seminar proposal, changes to our philosophy major tracks (required in part by the introduction of the Senior Seminar requirement) and this program review plan. This is our primary structure for on-going conversation. It is at these meetings where we will discuss how we will use the results of our assessment activities. We will try to keep records of these conversations for evidence of on-going program review in our department.

**IV. Use of results:** We will use what we learn from the Philosophical Perspectives reports in the ongoing revision of that course so that we can continue to do as good a job as possible helping students to understand and appreciate the role of philosophy in their Christian liberal arts education. We will use the results of the pre-tests and post-tests in our Reasoning Abstractly courses to continue to figure out how better to teach students how to reason philosophically in our Reasoning Abstractly courses. Finally, we will employ the Senior Seminar writing projects, not only to improve this course, but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a basis for improving our entire philosophy major program—especially with respect to how well we are enabling our students to learn to write well and to effectively integrate their philosophical learning with their Christian faith and life.

**V. Current discussion points:**

a. One issue we have wrestled with (and continue to discuss) is how to design our Philosophical Perspectives course so that it is not merely an introduction to philosophy but also an introduction to the role of philosophy in the Christian liberal arts. We have agreed on a topical outline that we hope will help us to achieve this goal in this course. However, we have ongoing questions about the
extent to which we need to be explicit in the course about links to other disciplines in particular.

b. Another question we are talking about is how to teach our Reasoning Abstractly courses in such a way as to highlight philosophical method as much as (or perhaps more than) philosophical content so as to justify the inclusion of these courses in this section of the GE program. This is not so much a problem with the Critical Reasoning and Logic course, since it is designed to be almost exclusively a methods course. However, it is an issue with our other Reasoning Abstractly courses. A related question is how much emphasis should be placed on abstract reasoning over other kinds of thinking in courses (like Christian Apologetics) that employ non-philosophical (such as historical) thinking in addition to philosophical reasoning.

c. A third issue is whether the 3-4 smaller writing projects we assign in the Senior Seminar in order to conform to the GE requirements could be separate essays connected loosely by a general overall theme or instead sub-sections of one unified overall philosophical essay. We need to decide whether to make this a matter of the individual professor’s choice or to have a policy that covers the course regardless of who teaches it (This is just a special instance of the larger issue of how much freedom each of us should have in teaching our courses and how much we should follow departmental standards that we agree on in the teaching of our courses. This issue applies especially to our teaching of Philosophical Perspectives.).