

# Philosophy Department Six-Year Report

## 2005-2011

### 1. Executive summary

#### A. Program mission statement and outcomes

##### Mission

The mission of Westmont's Department of Philosophy is to enable students to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and virtues of Christian philosophers—that is, to enable students to be lovers of wisdom in every sense.

##### General Education Student Learning Outcomes

*Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value:* Students will be able to articulate major philosophical ideas and describe their bearing on the Christian liberal arts.

*Reasoning Abstractly:* Students will be able (a) to 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), (b) to 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), and (c) to 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.

*Integrating the Major Discipline:* Using all of their previous studies in the major, graduating students will be able to assess a vital question of the discipline deeply, incorporating its relations to the Christian faith and a liberal arts education.

##### Major Program Student Learning Outcomes

*Knowledge:* Students will exhibit understanding of important philosophical positions, concepts, arguments, and themes.

*Skills:* Students will be able to construct structurally solid arguments and to critique faulty ones appropriately.

*Virtues:* Students will appreciate the value and limits of rational inquiry. In other words, they will display in their own thinking both the love of wisdom and Socratic humility.

#### B. Alignment Charts

Chart 6A in Appendix G indicates in which courses the GE and major program outcomes are being introduced, developed, mastered, and evaluated. (A

different presentation of similar information is provided in Chart 6B.) Note that the chart reflects some of the changes in the assessment process that have occurred over the last six years. In particular, major program goals that were originally to be assessed in most upper-level classes of the major are now scheduled to be assessed only in the Senior Seminar.

#### C. Three notable findings

1. A central finding of this report is that Westmont students would benefit in several different ways from the hiring of additional full-time philosophy faculty. This finding is supported by data comparing the scope of curricula and size of philosophy departments at other CCCU and California liberal arts schools, data comparing faculty loads at Westmont, and pedagogical recommendations of the American Philosophical Association.
2. Another finding of note is the remarkable consistency with which student of Philosophical Perspectives have met the outcome specified for the Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value portion of the General Education curriculum.
3. The Philosophy Department reports significant progress in developing an effective and sustainable assessment process over the last six years. The process is not complete, and it has not been without error. Nonetheless it has made great strides.

#### D. Important next steps

1. An important next step in the department's assessment process is developing shared rubrics for the evaluation of its GE and major program goals. The department already has materials that will be helpful in this step and it expects to make clear progress soon.
2. The Philosophy Department needs to consider a number of potentially far-reaching changes in its curriculum and major program structure. In particular it needs to consider carefully how and whether to expand its major course offerings, whether upper-division courses will be offered less frequently, and whether the number of units required for a major should be increased. Concretely, this requires the department to set aside some time for focused discussion of what will be best for its students.

## 2. Description of departmental mission and role within the College

#### A. The Department's Mission

As noted above, the mission of Westmont's Department of Philosophy is to equip students to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and virtues of Christian philosophers—that is, to enable students to be lovers of wisdom in every sense.

#### B. The Department's Contribution to the College's Mission

The college mission statement is: "Westmont College is an undergraduate, residential, Christian, liberal arts community serving God's kingdom by cultivating

thoughtful scholars, grateful servants and faithful leaders for global engagement with the academy, church and world." The Department of Philosophy cooperates with the rest of the institution to carry out every part of this mission by contributing to an undergraduate education for global engagement in a residential setting. However the department contributes in an especially noteworthy way to liberal arts education from a Christian perspective.

The department invites students to enter into the traditional philosophical concern for "the big picture," and in so doing encourages students to integrate all of their education into a broad vision of God's world and their place in it. The department provides students with practice in synthetic thinking and with historical models of such thinking. As the historical development of many academic disciplines suggests, this process is inevitably interdisciplinary. (Consider, for example, the origins of the natural sciences in what was known of "natural philosophy.") As students enter the practice of seeing things whole, they develop the habit of seeing things from others' perspectives as well as the skill of building a coherent understanding of their own.

The synthesis described above includes thinking about the bearing of the Christian faith on one's worldview. The use of reason in the service of God's kingdom is central to the department's mission. (This is not to say, however, that the departmental mission expresses a commitment to rationalism. To value the exercise of reason is not to proclaim that reason is the only or even the best source of knowledge about the world. To what extent reason is a source of knowledge is itself a philosophical question that deserves careful attention, and the department's mission presupposes no particular answer to it.) The department carries its mission out both by investigating many of the particular points of intersection or tension between Christian faith and students' worldviews, and also by modeling the faithful use of the intellect. Our hope is that the latter serves to foster the thoughtfulness and faithfulness that the college mission names.

### C. The Department's Contribution to General Education

The department serves students who are not philosophy majors by giving them a philosophical introduction to the Christian liberal arts (in courses meeting the Philosophical Reflections GE requirement: Philosophical Perspectives and Philosophical Perspectives: Honors) and by facilitating their ability to reason abstractly (in courses meeting the Reasoning Abstractly GE requirement: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Modern and Contemporary Philosophy, and Critical Reasoning and Logic). The department also staffs one Religious Studies course meeting the Reasoning Abstractly requirement (Apologetics).

In addition to the above, philosophy majors receive a comprehensive philosophical education from a Christian point of view that is designed to prepare them for life-long Christian philosophical reflection as either professional or lay philosophers. In the Senior Seminar, majors meet the GE requirements of Writing Intensive Course within the Discipline and Integrating the Major Discipline.

### D. Recent History of the Department

#### 1. Faculty and Staff

The current era of the department's history began with the arrival of Dr. Mark Nelson in 2006 and his installation in the newly established Monroe Chair of Philosophy. Dr. Nelson's appointment filled the gap left by Dr. Robert Wennberg's retirement. Since this time, Drs. Mark Nelson, James Taylor, and David Vander Laan have been the three full-time members of the department, and Dr. Christian Hoeckley, director of the Gaede Institute for the Liberal Arts, has regularly taught an annual section of Philosophical Perspectives.

During this period, Dr. Taylor served as department chair in the 2005-06, 07-08, and 08-09 academic years. Dr. Vander Laan served as chair in 2006-07 and from 2009 to the present.

In recent years the department has hired adjunct instructors more regularly than it had previously. This is due in part to the load reduction awarded to the Monroe Chair. It is also partly due to the current department chair's load reduction; the previous chair had generally been compensated financially for carrying out his duties. Dr. Wennberg taught in an adjunct capacity through 2008. Kevin Sharpe served in a one-year replacement position during Dr. Vander Laan's 2007-08 sabbatical. Chris Tennberg and Steven Huizenga served as adjunct instructors teaching Philosophical Perspectives during the 2008-09 academic year, and Timothy Linehan did the same during the 2009-10 and 10-11 years. Broadly speaking the department has been very pleased with the quality of adjunct instruction during these years.

## 2. Curriculum and Co-curricular Activities

The department continues to offer a 36-unit major; a detailed discussion of its content and a comparison to other philosophy programs is offered in the next section.

The most significant recent change in the department's curriculum is the creation of the Senior Seminar. Several lesser changes involve the status of Contemporary Moral Problems and the recent introduction of student summer research.

The Senior Seminar is the department's capstone course, satisfying the Integrating the Major Discipline GE category as well as the Writing Intensive within the Major requirement. The full-time members of the department share responsibility for teaching the Senior Seminar, each teaching it in the spring once every three years, *ceteris paribus*. The main effect of adding the course on the department's schedule has been a decrease in the frequency with which other spring courses have been taught, changing them either from annual to two-of-every-three-years courses, or from alternate year to one-of-every-three-years courses.

A smaller change involves Contemporary Moral Problems, which is no longer required for liberal studies majors. The effect of this change (apparently a result of changes in the State of California's requirements for liberal studies majors) is that sections of Contemporary Moral Problems have fewer students than they once did. In one respect this helps the class, since it makes the student population more uniformly prepared for the kinds of questions raised in such a

class. When some but not all students had already taken Ethics as part of a philosophy major and others had had very little philosophy, the course was challenging to pitch at an appropriate level of difficulty. The current question is how often the course ought to be taught, and whether students should be encouraged to take it prior to taking Ethics.

In the past the co-curricular activities of the department have included events of the Phi Sigma Tau honors society, informal gatherings of students at professors' homes, lunch meetings, film screenings, the annual department chapel, and the Senior Breakfast. A recent addition to these co-curricular activities is student summer research. In the summers of 2010 and 2011, Dr. Vander Laan made use of the pilot program for student research in the humanities and social sciences. The student participants in this program have received a significant amount of training in selected topics in metaphysics.

The current era of the department's life has not been one of radical change. However some of the changes that have occurred do have bearing on matters of staffing; these will be discussed in the analysis below.

### **3. Basic statistical information about the program: discussion and analysis**

#### A. Departmental Contributions

The curricula vitae of the regular members of the Philosophy Department can be found in Appendix A. As they show, members of the department have been active members of the college community and of their guild. To mention just a few highlights: Dr. Taylor has published an apologetics text with Baker Academic for use in his classes and has now begun another book project that will serve classes (like *Philosophical Perspectives*) that include discussion of the liberal arts. Dr. Nelson received the college's Faculty Research Award in 2010 and has recently published articles in such prestigious journals as *Mind* and *Analysis*, among others. He has also been elected the Vice Chair of the Faculty and is currently serving the institution in that post. Dr. Vander Laan has published articles in several journals and anthologies, co-authored a festschrift honoring Alvin Plantinga, refereed submissions to half a dozen journals, and begun a book project. They have all served the college on various committees and in other roles.

Perhaps the thing members of the department would most like to do better is to give more time to the activities of teaching and research. This is, of course, a frequently heard theme among academics. Nonetheless it is true that teaching and research are time-intensive activities that benefit from being given more time. The department's request to the institution, then, is to find ways to allow faculty to do their work more effectively. The recent restructuring of the Academic Senate and the reduction in the number institutional assessment outcomes seem to the department to be big steps in the right direction.

#### B. Part-Time Faculty

As Appendices B and C show, the Philosophy Department has consistently hired adjunct faculty in the last six years, often more than one at a time. This is a

noticeable increase over the number of adjuncts hired in the preceding six years, among which years with adjunct hires were the exception rather than the rule.

A variety of factors have played some role in this increase. a) The demand for sections of Philosophical Perspectives has remained high. Few other courses satisfy the Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value GE requirement; one of these (EB 9: Society, Morality, and Enterprise) has not been taught in the last few years. b) Dr. Hoeckley's job responsibilities have sometimes made it preferable for him not to teach a section of Philosophical Perspectives. c) Appointment to the Monroe Chair in Philosophy comes with a 4-unit reduction in teaching load. Dr. Nelson's predecessors in the department did not have similar load reductions. d) Dr. Vander Laan, the current chair, generally prefers to receive a course release for chair duties. During the years in which Dr. Taylor served as chair, in contrast, he received financial compensation.

The department has made an effort to hire adjuncts who are committed to the department's mission and who have demonstrated excellence in classroom teaching. In general it has been very pleased with the quality of instruction that its adjuncts have provided. Most have had strong teaching evaluations in their Westmont courses, and a number have been effective recruiters for the philosophy major.

Though the results of the department's adjunct hiring have generally been good, it seems preferable in several ways to staff the department's courses with full-time faculty to the extent that this is possible. Full-time faculty provide continuity in the student experience and opportunity for deeper relationships and meaningful conversation. The supply of full-time faculty is naturally more reliable than that of adjuncts. Further, students (and their parents) expect faculty members who hold terminal degrees, at least most of the time; this is one of the marks of a high-quality institution. It is also true that full-time faculty have a greater commitment to the institution.

Together these facts suggest that there would be a number of benefits to students and to the institution to hiring additional full-time faculty. This is addressed below in section 6C2.

### C. Women and Minority Representation

A quick glance suffices to show that women and minorities are not well represented in the philosophy faculty. (See Appendix A, Chart 1A.) One possible correction for this state of affairs is the hiring of women and minority faculty members. This possibility is endorsed below in section 6C2.

Toward the goal of hiring women and minorities, the department has a) identified women and minorities who might be good candidates for faculty positions at Westmont, b) cultivated contacts with women and minorities who might be able to refer other women and minorities to the department, and c) invited women and minority speakers to campus. (For details see the annual departmental diversity reports in the program review archive.) In addition to these ongoing activities, this fall Dr. Vander Laan will attend and report on the conference Changing Faces: Cultural Competency, Diversity, and

Reconciliation. This event will be facilitated by the CCCU Commission for Advancing Intercultural Competencies. The hope is that this event will give the department (and perhaps other segments of the college) better strategies and resources for hiring and retaining women and faculty of color—in part, no doubt, by providing a greater appreciation of the need for reconciliation, particularly within a Christian understanding of what makes for a flourishing community.

#### D. Gender and Ethnicity of Majors

Data on recent graduates of the philosophy program can be found in Appendix D (Chart 3). It indicates that over the last six years, the percentages of non-white philosophy graduates have been 14%, 0%, 0%, 14%, 38%, and 45%, with an overall percentage of about 18%. These numbers tend to rise toward the end of the sequence—in the last two cases exceeding the percentage of minority students in the student body—but it remains uncertain whether this represents a trend. Clearly the department has been helped by the increasing percentage of minority students matriculating at Westmont, and recently, at least, minority students have not been disproportionately avoiding the philosophy major. The department will be keen to see whether the percentages remain high in the next few years.

The percentages of women majors in the last six years have been 64%, 67%, 29%, 0%, 13%, and 38%, with an overall percentage of 33%. These numbers vary widely (as does the total number of majors). Perhaps this is to be expected given the relatively small number of majors. Over six years, however, we can see that the ratio of men to women is approximately the reciprocal of the ratio in the student body (i.e., 2:1 as opposed to 1:2). The major is by no means closed off to women, and in some classes women have been in a clear majority. But there is a tendency of the major to attract men more than women.

The department would like to be as welcoming to female students as it can be. One strategy it has used is to assign and highlight readings by prominent women philosophers when there is an opportunity. Another strategy is to invite women to campus as speakers, as the department has done on a variety of occasions. It would also help to hire female faculty members, something the department would very much like to do. Again see section 6C2.

#### E. Number of Majors

In the past six years the number of philosophy majors has ranged from 3 to 17 without any identifiable trend. The average number of graduating majors has been 10. This number is relatively low. It has made for some ideal student to faculty ratios in upper-division seminars; the disadvantage is that some of these classes have been in danger of not being offered at all. In one case, an upper division course had to be cancelled. The department does not want this to become a pattern.

Perhaps the most sensible conclusion to draw from this is that significant variation is to be expected when the average number of majors is relatively small to begin with. If such variation is to be expected, the number of majors is unstable, and it behooves the department to be consistent in recruiting students to the major. The department has not made any concerted effort to attract majors in past

(none, that is, apart from making the practice of philosophy as engaging as possible in its GE courses, being friendly to all students regardless of their major status, &c). This spring, having been notified by the provost's office that its recent upper-division courses had been unusually low in enrollment, the department discussed some possible recruitment strategies, including invitations to specific students, greater publicity for Phi Sigma Tau events, adding interested students to an e-mail list (the department does not yet use Twitter), and inviting students to participate in public philosophical debates or discussions. The department will continue to brainstorm strategies and hopes to implement some of them as soon as possible.

## 4. Programs

### A. Student Learning Outcomes

- 1) The department's general education and major program student learning outcomes are displayed in the Executive Summary (section 1A).
- 2) A matrix showing how student outcomes for the philosophy major are aligned to courses offered by the department, including links to the college Learning Standards, is displayed in the Executive Summary (section 1B).
- 3) In its official statement "The Teaching of Philosophy," the American Philosophical Association makes these recommendations, among others (see [www.apaonline.org/APAOnline/About\\_The\\_APA/Statements/Missions/Teaching\\_Statement.aspx](http://www.apaonline.org/APAOnline/About_The_APA/Statements/Missions/Teaching_Statement.aspx)).

**Writing.** Writing is of great importance in philosophical education, as one of the ways in which the abilities it fosters can and must be developed. It is crucial that courses in philosophy be structured and staffed in such a way that significant writing assignments can be made and thoughtfully assessed. These assignments may include papers of varying lengths, reports on readings, pro-and-con arguments, short-answer and essay exams (both in-class and take-home), and course diaries.

**Discussion.** Verbal interaction, in which ideas can be articulated and examined, questions asked, positions debated, and arguments presented and criticized, is essential both to the activity and discipline of philosophy and to philosophical education. The structuring and staffing of philosophy courses should make provision for it. Instructors (and discussion section leaders in large lecture courses) should be encouraged and helped to develop strategies for stimulating and facilitating in-class philosophical discussion and for drawing students into it.

**Teaching Loads.** Since good philosophical education is instructor-intensive, it is crucial to its quality that philosophy faculty be assigned teaching responsibilities that do not preclude the forms of interaction, assessment and feedback it requires, either by the number of courses or by the number of students for which they are responsible.



Practically speaking, this means that their teaching loads should be at the low end of the teaching load range for non-science faculty, with appropriate provision for assistance in large courses. (At institutions with significant expectations of their faculty in research, publication and professional activity, moreover, the teaching loads of philosophers must be compatible with these expectations.)

The APA statement goes on to comment that curricula ought to balance the character and needs of a given student population with the traditions and contemporary developments of the discipline. It specifically encourages the use of seminar courses at all levels as the optimal class setting for philosophical and liberal education.

Members of the philosophy faculty report that at present nearly every philosophy class at Westmont requires students to do a significant amount of writing. (Critical Reasoning and Logic is arguably an exception. This class requires writing well-crafted and formal versions of several arguments, along with brief prose analyses. Typical daily assignments require writing formal proofs or identifying fallacies in a series of arguments.) Sections of Philosophical Perspectives vary, but each involves either written responses to daily questions on the readings or essay assignments or essay exams. Several faculty comment that more writing and instructor feedback would be possible if sections of Philosophical Perspectives were capped at 25 rather than 40. Upper division courses all involve term papers or multiple essays of 2,000 words, as well as essay exams, though only the Senior Seminar is officially designated as a writing-intensive course.

Similarly, philosophy classes include a great deal of discussion. Philosophy faculty report that nearly all are either interactive, discussion-driven courses or seminar courses. In particular, the upper-division major courses in core areas are all seminar courses, as is the honors section of Philosophical Perspectives.

	<b>2006-07</b>	<b>2007-08</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>
Student Credit Hours per Unit of Instruction	21.4	22.5	24.3	22.3	22.6
Westmont Average	19.1	18.2	19.1	19.1	19.0
Students x Fac. Load/ Fac. Load Credit	19.3	20.3	21.9	20.2	20.3
Westmont Average	16.8	16.6	17.3	17.5	17.4

The APA also recommends teaching loads at the low end of those found among non-science classes. At Westmont it appears that the student load of philosophy faculty is consistently greater than the average, though these data do not distinguish between science and non-science classes. (See chart above.) That the philosophy teaching load is as large as it is no doubt due in significant measure to the size of Philosophical Perspectives sections,

which are currently capped at 40 students. Upper-division major courses are relatively small; as noted above, they are ordinarily taught as seminar classes. The APA statement quoted above suggests that the special benefits to students of seminar classes include greater interaction, assessment, and feedback.

Overall, Westmont's philosophy curriculum meets the recommendations of the APA. With respect to each of the three areas mentioned above, however, *the size of Philosophical Perspectives sections* emerges as a key to significant improvement. A decreased cap would allow for more writing, more feedback, more participation in class discussion, and more interaction between students and professors outside of class.

Since the APA statement does not specify any particular list or range of courses, it is useful to compare the curriculum of Westmont's philosophy department with that of other members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) and other California liberal arts schools. The chart below compares the sizes of institutions, philosophy departments, and philosophy curricula at some of the schools with which Westmont has often compared itself. (Note: the data here are based on college catalogs and online course listings. Thus Westmont is treated as offering 16 courses, even though two of these, Aesthetics and Philosophy of History, have not been taught in years and are not expected to be taught soon.)

<b>School</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Number of Faculty in Phil. Dept.</b>	<b>Students : Philosophy Faculty</b>	<b>Units for Major</b>	<b>Number of Courses Listed</b>
Westmont College	1,337	3	445.67	36	16
Wheaton College	2,400	7	342.86	32	28
Calvin College	3,991	11	362.82	33	36
Whittier College	1,367	3	455.67	30	34
Gordon College	1,500	5	300.00	40	31
Houghton College	1,200	3	400.00	32	32
Mills College	1,596	3	532.00	44	26
Occidental College	1,989	5	397.80	40	31
Pepperdine	3,000	3	1000.00	36	26
University of Redlands	2,410	5	482.00	32	33
Claremont McKenna	1,212	7	173.14	36	36
Scripps College	1,931	3	643.67	40	39
Pomona College	1,532	9	170.22	36	48
average	1,708.75	4.38	424.85	33	29.88

In summary, the chart indicates that the size of Westmont's philosophy department is as small as any in the comparison group. Its student to philosophy faculty ratio is high relative to other CCCU schools and middling relative to California liberal arts schools, which vary much more widely.

(Note, however, that the general education programs of Pepperdine and Scripps do not require or strongly encourage students to take a philosophy course. Relative to schools which do have such requirements, Westmont's student to faculty ratio is again high.) The number of units required for a major at Westmont is fairly typical. The number of courses listed, however, is conspicuously low—less than the number listed at any of the comparison schools and only a bit more than half the average.

The chart also indicates that every school in the comparison group has an odd number of philosophy faculty, though it would probably be an error to base any staffing decisions on this fact alone.

A spreadsheet submitted along with this report and included as Appendix F ("Curriculum Comparison") indicates more specifically which courses are offered ("O"), included in the institution's general education program ("GE"), and required in the major ("M"). Note that because of the wide variety of course titles, the courses listed in the spreadsheet should be regarded as categories of similar courses. For example, courses with titles like "Introduction to Philosophy" and "Survey of Basic Philosophical Questions" are listed under the heading "Philosophical Perspectives."

This chart adds some helpful detail to the data about size of curricula:

- (a) Philosophy of History is the oddball, i.e., the only course listed by Westmont but by none of the comparison schools. In practice, Philosophy of History has not been offered in the past six years.
- (b) Apart from Philosophical Theology and Senior Seminar, every other course offered by Westmont is widely offered at comparison schools.
- (c) The most widely offered courses not offered at Westmont are (in order) Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Mind, Medical Ethics, Late Modern and Contemporary Philosophy (or specific topics in this area), and Formal Logic.

On the whole Westmont's philosophy curriculum is far from eccentric; nearly every course offered is a course one would expect to find at any similar school. However, the data make it clear that Westmont's philosophy curriculum is unusually small, and they suggest that it would be worthwhile to expand the curriculum with additional courses. Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Mind are especially noteworthy candidates for inclusion. Some of the courses that Westmont currently offers overlap significantly in content with courses in Medical Ethics, Late Modern and Contemporary Philosophy, and Formal Logic. However, since other institutions often offer such courses in alongside courses like those offered at Westmont (e.g., topics in late modern philosophy in addition to a historical survey course, or advanced logic in addition to a critical reasoning course), it would also be worthwhile to consider adding courses in these areas and/or distributing the currently studied material across a greater number of courses. For example, in lieu of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy we might offer two courses, or we might offer one course in Critical Reasoning and another in Formal Logic rather than a single course that combines the two. The philosophy

department has discussed the potential pedagogical value of changes of this sort even prior to seeing the comparative data above; there may be several distinct reasons to expand the range of course offerings.

- 4) As described above, the department's co-curricular activities include events of the Phi Sigma Tau honors society, informal gatherings of students and professors, and summer research.

Of the three, the last is the one that works in the most concentrated way toward the knowledge outcome. In order to familiarize themselves with the professor's project, research students have read a large number of articles and book chapters—more than a student would read in a semester-long course on the same topic—and in the process have developed an impressive specialization in the relevant areas of philosophy.

Events sponsored by Phi Sigma Tau, such as movie screenings/discussions and debates between members of the faculty, work toward both the knowledge and skill goals. These cases generally apply ideas with which the students are already familiar to novel situations or invite students to practice their argumentative skills by assessing competing views; in the process students come to understand those views and their implications better.

Various other informal gatherings do some of the same things. They also serve as opportunities for faculty members to model the virtues the department hopes to see in students. Virtues are best gained by modeling and practice, and so faculty use occasions like these to engage students in the practice of thinking things through, thoughtfully, rigorously, with persistence, and from a Christian perspective.

## B. Assessment of the Outcomes

In general and in brief, the department's assessment process proceeds as follows. The department chair collects the department's assessment data from individual instructors. The department discusses assessment results in its regular meetings; in particular, the first or second meeting of each semester includes discussion of the previous semester's results. At these meetings the department looks at assessment results, considers possible changes in assessment tools and teaching strategies, and plans implementation of any changes that are adopted (generally during the next cycle of assessment for the outcome under consideration). The department also frequently meets to discuss assessment near the end of each semester to reiterate its assessment plans for the current cycle. The department also discusses matters of assessment at other occasions throughout the academic year, e.g., when it receives a response to its annual assessment report from the Program Review Committee.

### 1) Overview

The philosophy department's assessment activities have evolved considerably over the last six years. During the academic years 2005-08 the department's activities chiefly concerned general education assessment, specifically assessment of the GE requirements Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value and Reasoning Abstractly. During the 08-09 academic year the department devoted an unusual amount of effort to assessment activities in response to the

direction of the college. The department continued to adjust its methods for assessing GE courses, developed a new mission statement, formulated three major program goals and corresponding student learning outcomes, and outlined a plan to assess each of the major program goals in each of its upper division courses. The assessment plan was far too ambitious, as the Program Review Committee (PRC) made clear in its response to the 08-09 annual assessment report. The department thus devised a new, streamlined plan along the lines of the PRC's suggestions during 2009-10. Later conversation with the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness made it clear that the SLO's themselves were also too elaborate, each comprising several sub-outcomes that were, effectively, outcomes in themselves. During 2010-11, then, the department moved in the direction of simplifying its major program outcomes. (The current versions appear in section IA of this report.) The first round of major program assessment under the new schedule and with new outcomes is currently underway.

The knowledge outcome was the first to be assessed under the current major program assessment schedule. It was assessed in 2009-10 in both Ethics and the Senior Seminar. Dr. Nelson reports that in his Ethics class 44% of students scored "good" or "excellent" on the assessment tool (a 2000-word essay) and that 80% scored "OK" or better. This result seemed decent but left plenty of room for improvement. Dr. Nelson noted, however, that the course had an unusually high enrollment and that many of the students were not philosophy majors. In the Senior Seminar, Dr. Vander Laan reported, the knowledge outcome was embedded in a multi-part essay question on the final exam. Each of the five responding students gave strong answers that demonstrated their knowledge of the relevant issues and the views of particular thinkers on those issues.

The results gathered in the Senior Seminar were encouraging, while those in the Ethics class were less clear, given the presence of non-majors in the class. Taking into account the PRC's response to the 2008-09 annual report, the department has already made plans to assess its major program outcomes in the Senior Seminar exclusively, and this approach will solve the problem of a lack of clarity in assessment results due to the inclusion of non-majors. The results gathered on majors' performance indicate that philosophy majors are reaching the department's knowledge outcome consistently, though this conclusion will be strengthened by similar results in future years. So far this area seems to be a departmental strength to be carried into the future, and this is what the department plans to do. The department will also continue to discuss whether the new outcome statements are indeed suitable or whether they need further revision.

The virtues outcome was assessed by Dr. Nelson in the spring 2011 Senior Seminar by an essay question on the final exam. Dr. Nelson used a rubric to assess students' answers with respect to charity, humility, carefulness, creativity, and fair-mindedness; he then used students' scores on these criteria to assign an overall virtue score to each answer. He found that 25% of the students tested received an overall score of "excellent," 37.5% an overall score of "good," and 37.5% an overall score of "OK." All students received an overall score of "OK" or better, which is to say that none received a "needs work" or "poor" or "failure" score. Dr. Nelson observed that this result is good but leaves room for improvement given that Senior Seminar is an upper-level class. Since this

assessment was carried out at the end of the spring 2011 semester, the department will discuss these results early in the fall 2011 semester. At this stage, however, two next steps seem to be clear candidates. First, since the results leave some appreciable room for improvement, the department will want to consider how students might be better prepared to exemplify the virtues being assessed. It may consider, for example, whether more explicit instruction in this area would be useful. Second, since the department has recently streamlined its major program outcomes, the new outcome statements will be included in future assessment tools. The rubric Dr. Nelson used for his assessment serves as a strong first draft of a departmental rubric for virtues assessment. As in the case of the knowledge outcome, the department will discuss whether the current outcomes are indeed suitable or whether further revision is needed.

The skills outcome will be assessed by Dr. Vander Laan in the spring 2012 Senior Seminar. This will complete the first round of assessment of major program outcomes.

## 2) The details

The 2009-10 annual assessment report said this about the department's knowledge outcome.

In Ethics this goal was assessed with a 2000-word essay, and in the Senior Seminar it was assessed with a multi-part question on the final exam (approximately one page). In Ethics half of the 44 students scored "good" or "excellent," and over 80% scored "OK" or better.

In the Senior Seminar the outcome was assessed via a one-page essay question. All 5 of the responding students gave strong answers that displayed their knowledge of both the issues and the views of the particular thinkers named in the question. ...

The result in Ethics seemed decent but left room for improvement, particularly given that Ethics is an upper-division class. It is worth noting that the class had an unusually high enrollment, and that not nearly all students were philosophy majors or minors. The result in the Senior Seminar, in contrast, was clearly encouraging. Together these results suggest that by the time of their graduation, those who major in philosophy understand philosophical ideas, the views of particular philosophers, and the contributions of Christian philosophers to ongoing and historical debates. It is to be expected that Ethics (which will always be taken before the Senior Seminar) shows somewhat weaker results, and this would be expected even if the students were all philosophy majors. Still, it is worth seeing whether the result can be improved in the future.

As noted in the summary above, the department now plans to assess the knowledge (and other) major outcomes in the Senior Seminar alone, not in each of the upper-division major courses. Also, the outcomes

themselves have been streamlined and are not so unwieldy as the versions that appear in the 2009-10 report.

The skills and virtues outcomes were not assessed for the 2009-2010 annual assessment report, so the report contains no discussion of them beyond the statements of those outcomes. Both outcomes have now been streamlined considerably.

### C. Conclusions

Overall, it seems that philosophy students are doing well at meeting the outcomes the department has in mind for them, though the skills outcome has not been formally assessed. Still, initial results are encouraging. (We may note that there is likely to be some salient overlap between the skills of the major program outcomes and the skills assessed in the Reasoning Abstractly component of the GE curriculum. However, the students taking Reasoning Abstractly courses will not all be philosophy majors, so those results do not provide much information about how well philosophy majors are meeting the skills outcome.)

The department has made considerable progress in formal assessment of student learning in the past six years. It has gone from an assessment process focused on the general education program to one that includes both general education and the major program. Student learning outcomes have been developed and redeveloped, and a schedule for assessment has been created and refined in conversation with the Program Review Committee and the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness. While the process is not yet complete, an effective and sustainable assessment process for the major program (in the context of major *and* GE assessment) now seems to be within reach, and the department expects to have the remaining elements of the process (rubrics in particular) in place in the next cycle of assessment.

Comparison with philosophy programs at other institutions and guidelines promulgated by the APA provide some helpful perspective that does not emerge from the assessment data, and they suggest some changes for the department to consider. In particular, comparisons suggest that it would be valuable in several ways (1) to decrease the size of Philosophical Perspectives sections and (2) to broaden the range of upper division courses. The department has begun to consider how these changes might be made. Both of them suggest that additional faculty are necessary for the department to significantly improve its program; this will be considered in the Financial and Program Resources section below.

### D. Future

Broadly, the direction of the department's next major program assessment efforts will be to continue refining the major program assessment tools and to integrate the department's major program and general education assessment schedule into the institutional assessment cycle. The first step will be to assess the remaining departmental outcome; at that point the department will have completed a cycle of program evaluation and will have a baseline for use during future cycles.

More specifically, the department will refine its assessment tools by adopting rubrics for each of its three major program outcomes. This will allow us to make our

assessment tools more uniform and to communicate the department's goals with students more effectively. So far the department has looked at model rubrics from other institutions but has not yet adopted any particular rubric for its own use. Now that a more manageable assessment schedule is in place, it seems to be an ideal time to refine the tools we will be using. The model rubrics will be useful resources in this process, as will the more elaborate outcomes the department developed before the current, streamlined outcomes.

As the department reported in its 2009-10 annual assessment report, its multi-year assessment plan calls for the assessment of the virtues outcome in 2010-11, of several GE outcomes in 2011-12 and 2012-13 (see below), of the knowledge outcome in 2013-14, and of the skills outcome in 2014-15. This plan was designed to fit the schedule of institution-level assessment. The institutional schedule has recently changed, but not in a way that creates any conflicts with the department's plan. Thus the department currently expects to continue to assess its major program goals according to the timeline already in place.

## 5. General Education and Service Courses

### A. Overview

The Philosophy Department has primary responsibility for teaching courses that satisfy the Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value (hereafter PRTV) requirement, which it does by offering the Philosophical Perspectives course. The department also contributes to the general education program by offering three courses that meet the Reasoning Abstractly requirement: Ancient & Medieval Philosophy, Modern & Contemporary Philosophy, and Critical Reasoning & Logic. A fourth course, Apologetics, also meets the Reasoning Abstractly requirement; this course is offered by the Religious Studies department, but it is taught by a member of the Philosophy department. In recent years Dr. Taylor has had the sole responsibility for teaching Apologetics. Finally, the Philosophy Department's Senior Seminar also satisfies the general education requirements Integrating the Major Discipline and Writing Within the Major.

#### 1. Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value

Typically eight sections of Philosophical Perspectives are offered each academic year. This includes one honors section in the spring and one section offered during Mayterm. Assuming that one section of Philosophical Perspectives and one other course is offered during Mayterm, 40% of the department's load is dedicated to Philosophical Perspectives. (Apart from Mayterm the figure is 38.9%.)

By the design of the General Education Committee, the Philosophy Department has primary responsibility for offering courses that fulfill the PRTV requirement. The other courses that have satisfied the requirement are Political Theory and Ideology (POL 30), Morality, Information, Logic, and Knowledge (CS 50, formerly Information and Computation: History and Ethics), and Society, Morality, and Enterprise (EB 9). The GE Committee has consulted the Philosophy Department from time to time when deciding whether a given course ought to satisfy the PRTV requirement.



#### a) Schedule of PRTV Assessment

During nearly all of the period covered by this report (2005-10), the Philosophy Department has assessed the PRTV outcome whenever Philosophical Perspectives has been taught, that is, each semester. Early in this period there was a good deal of discussion among departments offering courses satisfying the PRTV requirement, and the assumption seemed to be that each of these departments would gather PRTV assessment data continuously.

The Program Review Committee's response to the 2009-2010 annual report suggested that the department carry out assessment in Philosophical Perspectives only once in each six-year reporting cycle in order to maintain a pattern that is not overly onerous and time-consuming. The department plans to take up this suggestion in the coming cycle. The next year of PRTV assessment in the department's multi-year assessment plan is 2014-15.

#### b) Revision of the Student Learning Outcome Statement

Representatives of departments that offer one of these courses have met in recent years to discuss the way in which assessment is to be carried out in these courses. Faculty have made an effort to make the scale used in reporting assessment results more uniform (allowing, naturally, for different assessment tools in different courses). This group revised PRTV goals in 2007-08 and concluded that more specific learning outcomes were needed. Such outcomes were used the following year. During the 2010-11 academic year the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness suggested that the outcome statement for the PRTV requirement be made more concise. For comparison, the Philosophy Department's 2008 Assessment Report described a three-part PRTV outcome:

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.

The language above mirrors the General Education Committee's standards for courses satisfying the PRTV requirement. This past spring, representatives of the relevant departments agreed instead to use this simpler statement for measuring outcomes:

Students will be able to articulate major philosophical ideas and describe their bearing on the Christian liberal arts.

While the aims of the longer statement remain worthwhile, the more concise outcome will simplify the assessment process, the reporting process, and communication between departments. The shorter statement does surprisingly well at including the content of the three-part statement, and so the shorter version looks like a promising tool for future PRTV assessment. However it is still new, and no doubt there will be continuing conversation among the relevant departments on whether it has functioned well.

#### c) Scope of the PRTV Requirement

One possible issue to be considered by the General Education Committee is whether the current description and name of the PRTV requirement is accurate and desirable. The Philosophy Department has discussed this question at a number of its regular meetings, though it has not made any proposal to the GE Committee.

The central question here is whether the statement of the requirement in GE Committee's primary document is too narrow, focusing on two particular topics ("truth" and "value," presumably meant to include epistemology and ethics) when a broader scope is intended. The primary document used by the GE Committee says that courses supplementing those taught within the Philosophy Department and satisfying the PRTV requirement will address "a comparable range of philosophical concerns." In its interpretive statement, the GE Committee's supplemental document comments, "Ideally this would involve a course focusing on and devoting roughly equal time to philosophical questions about ultimate reality, knowledge and value. However, a course may qualify if it emphasizes one of these sorts of questions over the others as long as (a) the course is primarily philosophical in emphasis and (b) it addresses each of these sorts of questions to some extent."

The interpretive statement suggests that courses meeting the requirement ought to be broader than the name "Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value" and the primary document are likely to suggest. It seems to follow the contours of one traditional division of philosophy into the subfields of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. The Philosophy Department does not wish to assert that this particular division is sacrosanct; some philosophers might wish to add philosophy of language as a distinct subfield, and logic and/or philosophical methodology is arguably as central to the discipline as the three areas

mentioned above. Still, the interpretive statement's threefold criterion for PRTV courses does seem more comprehensive and less miscellaneous than the primary document's criterion.

It also has the advantage of encouraging exploration of the metaphysical underpinnings of epistemological and ethical views. Since many of the most prominent philosophical disputes of the current era are shaped by metaphysical disputes (naturalism vs. theism, for one conspicuous example), it seems difficult to achieve the outcome discussed in the previous section without some serious discussion of metaphysics. This is particularly so given that Westmont hopes to equip students to frame and refine Christian worldviews, since such worldviews will inevitably incorporate ways of thinking about God, the natural world, and human nature, i.e., about the character of reality.

The above suggests that there are some reasons to consider altering the primary GE document's criteria and the name 'Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value' as well. Making metaphysical questions an explicit part of the requirement would bring it more closely in line with current practice. Nonetheless one question the GE Committee would need to discuss is whether a change of this sort would be significant enough to require a vote of the full faculty, or whether harmonizing the primary and supplemental documents could be regarded as a minor change within the authority of the GE Committee itself.

## 2. Reasoning Abstractly

As noted above, the Philosophy Department offers three courses that meet the Reasoning Abstractly requirement: Ancient & Medieval Philosophy, Modern & Contemporary Philosophy, and Critical Reasoning & Logic. Representatives of the department have met with members of other departments in recent years to discuss how assessment of the Reasoning Abstractly requirement is to be carried out, and to make that process reasonably uniform across the various courses that satisfy the requirement. These discussions have produced a template for reporting assessment data in this area.

As noted earlier, the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness has helpfully identified a number of areas in which the college and the department can streamline its assessment process, e.g., by simplifying unnecessarily complex outcome statements. However the Reasoning Abstractly outcome, as it stands, is still rather complex. The Philosophy Department has assumed that this issue will be revisited in due course. Meanwhile, it continues to use the outcome that is in place and to report its results using the most recent version of the reporting template.

Another area of suggested streamlining is in the scheduling of Reasoning Abstractly assessment. The Philosophy Department has assessed outcome in Reasoning Abstractly courses each semester from 2005-06 to 2009-10. As in the case of PRTV assessment, the department now plans to carry out Reasoning Abstractly assessment once in each six-year reporting cycle so as to make the overall assessment process a sustainable one.

### 3. Integrating the Major Discipline

To date the Philosophy Department has not undertaken any assessment activities related specifically to the Integrating the Major Discipline requirement. In this the department has taken its cues from the assessment priorities of the institution, focusing on the PRTV and Reasoning Abstractly requirements. The department expects to begin assessment of the Integrating the Major Discipline requirement in the Senior Seminar of 2012-13, in accordance with the multi-year assessment plan.

### 4. Writing within the Major

To date the Philosophy Department has not undertaken any assessment activities related specifically to the Writing with the Major requirement. The college will be assessing this requirement at the institutional level during the 2011-12 academic year, and the department will cooperate with the college in this process.

### 5. Apologetics

Apart from other GE courses, Apologetics is the Philosophy Department's primary service course. It is the only course taught solely by a member of the Philosophy Department but offered by another department (Religious Studies). (Two others, Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology, are cross-listed as Religious Studies Courses.) The department's role in staffing this course has not been the subject of much discussion within the department recently, and it has not discussed it in any formal way with the Religious Studies Department. So far forth, that seems to be an indication that both departments are more or less satisfied with the current arrangement.

Dr. Taylor has invested a good deal of work in the area of Christian apologetics, not only teaching the Apologetics course regularly for many years, but also publishing an apologetics text with Blackwell in 2006. He hopes to continue teaching the course.

Thus the natural course of action seems to be to carry on the recent pattern. Nonetheless the Philosophy Department's responsibility for this course does have a bearing on the extent to which its faculty are available to teach courses inside the department. At the least the present arrangement is part of the context that should inform any discussions about other matters of curriculum and staffing.

## B. Assessment of Outcomes

### 1. Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value

The following summarizes the PRTV assessment activities and results as recorded in the department's annual reports since 2005-06 and data and individual reports collected during 2010-11.

During the academic year 2005-06 a new assessment plan was implemented to bring the department's Philosophical Perspectives courses in line with the goals

of the GE curriculum. Each instructor adopted new course readings to facilitate the discussion of faith/learning integration. The department expected that these would equip students to reach the PRTV student learning outcomes. In the spring, to clarify what the department hoped to see from its students, the members of the department adopted individual benchmarks for their PRTV assessment (e.g., that 80% of students would demonstrate a very good to excellent grasp of the terms 'philosophy,' 'worldview,' and 'liberal arts').

The initial results of this plan seemed strong, with all or nearly all students articulating (in essays or exam questions) the contribution of philosophy to their liberal arts education in way that was acceptable or exemplary. Nonetheless the department identified several ways to improve its assessment process, and in the spring adjusted its plan so as to include clearer expectations for students, more course time devoted to the topics on which students were assessed, and more specific, uniform goals.

Spring assessment results were also strong, though (with the exception of the honors section) slightly less so than in the fall. The results of the 2006-07 year were very similar, which the department took as evidence that its PRTV outcomes were being consistently met.

During 2007-08 the PRTV goals were recast in cooperation with the instructors of PRTV classes outside the Philosophy Department. Discussion with the assessment group led the department to conclude that a) more specific definitions were needed in the SLO statements, b) more SLOs were needed, c) PRTV instructors would benefit from a shared evaluation rubric, and d) students needed more resources (specific instruction, texts, &c) in order to succeed in this area. New SLOs (items a and b) were drafted during the year, and by the end of the following year philosophy PRTV instructors had adopted new texts more specifically directed toward the aims of the PRTV requirement. Since the group was meeting regularly to make revisions in the PRTV process, and because Dr. Vander Laan was on sabbatical, PRTV assessment in the department took place only in Dr. Taylor's section of Philosophical Perspectives in the fall and in his honors section and Dr. Nelson's regular section in the spring. More than 80% of the students were judged "very good" or "excellent" in their ability to articulate how philosophy contributed to their Christian liberal arts education and exceeded the benchmarks set by the department. These results were very satisfactory.

During 2008-09 the department's assessment focus turned to drafting a new mission statement and new program goals. The pattern of conducting assessment activities in Philosophical Perspectives continued, however. The results appeared to be consistent with those of previous years, though because new SLOs were being used by most of the faculty, a direct comparison cannot be made. Numerically, the number of students reaching the benchmarks had about the same average, though with a somewhat broader deviation than in previous years. The overall results seemed to the department to be acceptable, though allowing some room for improvement. Dr Taylor made plans to use a supplemental reading assignment in future semesters. (The honors section, as usual, did very well, 100% of students demonstrating high proficiency with the outcome.)

Student achievement of departmental outcomes was strong in 2009-10. In the seven sections of Philosophical Perspectives, approximately 90% of students gave a demonstration of their ability to articulate fundamental philosophical questions and the contribution of philosophy to the Christian liberal arts. This year four of these sections were offered by adjunct faculty, and the department was gratified to see how well students reached the assessment outcomes under their instruction. As in previous years, student performance in the honors section was particularly strong. Overall the department gladly noted that its PRTV outcomes continued to be consistently met.

In 2010-11 the college adopted a new institution-level schedule of assessment in which the PRTV requirement would not be assessed that year. Since the Philosophy Department had set up its multi-year assessment plan in such a way as to coordinate with the institution's schedule, the change seemed to the department to obviate the need for PRTV assessment during that academic year. However this change was either not communicated clearly or later forgotten, and some PRTV assessment data was collected as in previous years. The department had begun converting its assessment data to an electronic format and storing data and results on the shared drive dedicated to that purpose, so some PRTV data and results are available there along with data and results for the department's major program goals.

## 2. Reasoning Abstractly

As in the case of PRTV, a new Reasoning Abstractly assessment plan was implemented in 2005-06. The department's goal at that time was that students taking a Reasoning Abstractly GE course would "demonstrate increased facility with abstract philosophical reasoning." In a number of cases approximately 50% more students were able to demonstrate facility with argument-identification skills the instructor had chosen to test, but in some cases there was no measurable improvement. Students did not in general meet the benchmarks the instructors had chosen for their Reasoning Abstractly classes (e.g., "80% of students will be able to identify the premises and conclusions of a prose argument"). The results were thus mixed. The department planned to prepare a shared set of instructions on writing well-crafted arguments that could be included in syllabi for Reasoning Abstractly courses.

Less data was collected during 2006-07, but the data that was collected was consistent with that of the previous year. Again there was some improvement, but again it did not meet the benchmark that had been chosen.

Again as in the case of PRTV, 2007-08 saw a notable increase in the pace of Reasoning Abstractly assessment discussions as members of the Philosophy Department met with other instructors of Reasoning Abstractly courses to refine SLOs and assessment methods. During this year more specific SLOs aimed at argument recognition, construction, and evaluation had been written. Data collected in this area by the Philosophy Department was solely from Dr. Taylor's fall section of Apologetics and spring section of Modern & Contemporary Philosophy, since Dr. Vander Laan was on sabbatical. Following the approach of the Reasoning Abstractly assessment group, students' work was assessed as superior, good, fair, or poor. The benchmarks identified earlier did

not apply to these proficiency categories, but as 68% of students achieved superior or good results, it seems unlikely that an 80% benchmark like the one that had been used earlier would have been reached.

In 2008-09 students were evaluated on a High/Some/No Proficiency scale (though some instructors used more evaluation categories than others). Between 57% and 81% of students were assessed in the top two categories. This was not enough to reach the benchmarks the department had been using in previous years. The department discussed whether further student resources (most likely additional class time devoted to helping students develop the relevant skills) would be needed. The department also discussed how much variation in the results was due to variation in the student population taking the courses in which they were evaluated. However, there was improvement in some cases over previous years' results, perhaps a benefit due to textual resources that had already been provided.

The questions raised by the department were raised even more sharply by the 2009-10 assessment results. This year students in the Christian Apologetics class exceeded the 80% benchmark, with 91% demonstrating "some proficiency" or "mastery." However the results in Critical Reasoning and Logic were notably poorer; only 43% of students scored "acceptable" or "exemplary" in argument recognition and construction, and 70% in argument evaluation. The department again discussed to what extent these results might be due to variations in the student population. Dr. Vander Laan decided to discontinue daily assignment checks in favor of more classroom time dedicated to working through examples. However he decided to retain an increased emphasis on writing well-crafted versions of arguments.

As noted in the previous section, the college adopted a new institutional schedule of assessment during the 2010-11 academic year. The Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness also suggested during this year that the department make its assessment schedule more sustainable. The Philosophy Department thus gathered no Reasoning Abstractly data, but it is scheduled to do so again during 2011-12.

### C. Conclusions

The period covered by this report was one of many changes in assessment plans, strategies, tools, and outcomes, to say nothing of the variety of faculty involved in the process. As a result it is somewhat difficult to generalize about the process and quantify its results. In a few instances there were also communication difficulties about the department's expectations, sometimes owing to the discontinuities of sabbaticals.

Nonetheless, the department's assessment activities do appear to indicate quite clearly that students are very consistently accomplishing the goals set for them in the GE's PRTV category. The department is very pleased to note that students are successfully reaching the outcomes it especially hopes for them. The results are less clearly successful in the Reasoning Abstractly category, though here, too, students have been fairly consistent. Even if as a population they have not always met the benchmarks the department has had in mind, they have nonetheless hovered a bit

below them, and indication that many students are benefiting from the Reasoning Abstractly aspect of the curriculum. The results also raise the question whether the benchmarks chosen by the department have been too ambitious, and whether lower benchmarks might be more realistic and appropriate. The department will continue to consider this question in the year to come.

Two lesser conclusions that might be drawn from the above results are that student learning in the areas of assessment is responsive to changes in instructors' teaching strategies, and there remains some variation from year to year in how well students meet the outcomes. Some of this variation is apparently unrelated to the department's teaching and assessment strategies (and is perhaps inevitable). Still, the department gladly notes that student performance as a whole is remarkably consistent, and the variation one expects with a varying student population does not undermine the department's ability to equip students with a valuable educational experience.

#### D. Future

The natural next step for the department's PRTV assessment is to create and adopt a shared rubric for the evaluation of student performance toward the PRTV outcomes. The department has a number of resources to help with this process, including sample rubrics from other institutions. The department will also be able to make use of its earlier work on student learning outcomes. The outcomes it created were too unwieldy for ongoing use as outcomes, but many of the subsidiary goals they described could be incorporated into a rubric for the assessment of the new, streamlined outcome. The department will work on this project in advance of the next round of PRTV assessment and will plan to share its work with faculty members outside the department who teach PRTV courses.

In the Reasoning Abstractly area the department will continue to develop pedagogical tools aimed at equipping students with argument identification, construction, and evaluation skills. The department once discussed creating a guide to writing well-crafted arguments that could be included in Reasoning Abstractly syllabi. This tool would not have been particularly useful for those Reasoning Abstractly courses taught outside the Philosophy Department, and so the department did not pursue that idea once the Reasoning Abstractly assessment group began its work. It might nonetheless be worthwhile within the department, and the department will discuss this and other potential tools.

The Reasoning Abstractly outcome has not yet been streamlined in the way the PRTV outcome has been, and so the department plans to cooperate with others in the Reasoning Abstractly assessment group to create a simplified outcome that will serve all Reasoning Abstractly courses. Once a revised outcome has been agreed upon the department will be in a position to create a rubric for the department's evaluation of this outcome.

The department will also continue to consider and discuss whether it would serve students well to divide the Critical Reasoning & Logic course into two courses, one a GE course aimed at practical, informal reasoning tools, the other a course emphasizing formal and advanced logic of the sort that would be helpful for majors and especially helpful for those considering graduate school.



## 6. Financial and Program Resources

### A. Financial Resources

The Philosophy Department's greatest financial needs are in the areas of professional development, which falls outside the scope of the departmental budget, and staffing (see section C2 below).

The department's operating budget has generally been adequate for its activities in recent years. The department has been able to add resources to the library collection, to fund student membership in the Phi Sigma Tau national honor society, and to host the annual Senior Breakfast and other occasional events. In cooperation with the Religious Studies Department, the Philosophy Department has hired student workers to assist its administrative assistant. It has also occasionally hired promising philosophy students as teaching assistants (with minor grading and sometimes tutoring duties). The department has also had modest funds available for its Outstanding Senior Award and the Robert N. Wennberg Award. (The Wennberg Award was given through 2011; in years to come it will be replaced by a Wennberg Scholarship with similar criteria and will not be funded by the departmental budget.)

In the past two years the department has hired a student to do summer research with a faculty member. The student has worked approximately half time for 8-10 weeks. While the budget has been able to accommodate this research, it is possible that the budget will be strained in future years if the department opts to hire students both for summer research and for teaching assistant duties during the school year. 2011-12 will be a test case, since it is likely that the department will hire a teaching assistant in the spring. It is also possible that additional funds would be needed if the department hired more than one student to do summer research. The department has not made any particular commitment to hiring student summer researchers on a regular basis, so it is not entirely clear at this point what impact on future budgets summer research may have.

Though the operating budget has generally met the department's needs, that is not to say that it could not make good use of additional funds if they were available. As noted in the next section, e.g., the philosophy resources in the library have been serviceable but not exhaustive. As another example, the department has not pursued the goal of bringing its best students to a professional conference on the assumption that this would be prohibitively expensive. On a grander scale, if the institution were able to proceed with its long-term building plans, a "learning lounge" would serve students by encouraging unhurried conversation with faculty.

### B. Program Resources

#### 1. The Library Collection/Database resources

The philosophy faculty make regular use of the library collection and databases. Though these resources by no means exhaust the range of resources that would be useful for research and teaching purposes, they are nonetheless sufficient for ordinary use. The philosophy faculty do make some use of other resources (e.g., other libraries, Westmont's Inter Library Loan

service) when doing research, but they have not found the scope of Westmont's resources to be problematic.

One item of special importance for the department is The Philosopher's Index, a searchable database of nearly all philosophical work published in English (and some other languages as well). The Index has become one of the standard tools of research in philosophy and is extremely useful for that purpose. Next in importance are full-text journal archives, especially JSTOR. Though not all important journal articles are available through JSTOR or other archives, many of them are. When articles can be located and downloaded through such an archive, it simplifies the research process a great deal. The department thus hopes that these resources will continue to be prioritized by the library.

Another resource that bears mentioning is the online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP). As philosophy research has shifted online, it has become one of the most important first stops for professionals in the field, provided high-quality entries on major topics, often including references to a good deal of recent work. In this respect the SEP has supplanted The Encyclopedia of Philosophy as the standard reference work (if the Encyclopedia can be said to have held that position). The SEP has been growing in recent years, but it remains incomplete; this is to be expected in a relatively young online reference work. Happily, the SEP is available via the web and requires no institutional subscription.

The library has compiled these and other philosophy resources on the LibGuide section of the library website.

Student use of the library collection and databases is more difficult to characterize. The department has no data on student use of these resources, so it is not clear whether students continue to make significant use of print resources, or whether student use of resources has changed since the library renovation. However the philosophy faculty does refer students to the resources mentioned above, and sometimes to specific works available in the library, so it would not be surprising if the resources most important to philosophy faculty were important to students as well.

The department has worked with library staff to augment the print collection and to discontinue journal and monograph series subscriptions that were deemed non-essential.

## 2. Library staff

The philosophy department's library liaison in 2009-10 was Mary Logue, and in 2010-11 was Marilyn Nichols. After Marilyn's retirement during the summer of 2011, Robin Lang took up the post. The department's primary contact with its liaison has been its communications regarding which books would be most desirable to add to the collection. As noted above, the department has also cooperated with the liaison to review print and electronic journal subscriptions and with the aim of discontinuing those that were not needed.

In general the department has not made unusually heavy use of the library staff, but it has been pleased with the support of its liaison and occasional help from other members of the staff. The library staff has been consistently helpful, professional, and eager to support the educational mission of the department and the college.

### 3. The Internship Office

Dr. Taylor has served as the departmental internship specialist and has maintained a more than cordial relationship with the staff of the Internship Office. The office has been helpful in working with the department's majors to find internships suitable to their interests and abilities. To date this process appears to have gone smoothly, and no noteworthy difficulty has come to the Philosophy Department's attention. The department looks forward to continued cooperation with the Internship Office and offers its thanks.

### 4. The Office of Life Planning

The Philosophy Department has not had any direct transactions with the Office of Life Planning, though in conversation with its director it has discussed the idea of integrating a visit to the office into the requirements of the Senior Seminar, which in any case has one eye on the post-graduation lives of students. The director was more than open to this idea, and the department has no doubt that the office would be very helpful in pursuing it. The department is not in a position to offer suggestions to the Office of Life Planning, but it is happy for the reminder to consider making use of its services for students' benefit.

### 5. Off-campus Programs

The Philosophy Department does not have any regular interaction with the office of Off-Campus Programs (OCP). The one occasional point of contact concerns what was once the Social Issues and the Human Condition (SIHC) track of the major program, now downgraded from a track to a concentration. (That is, majors are not required to take any particular track to complete the program, but the former tracks are now offered as examples of major programs suitable for students with particular interests or career goals.) The SIHC concentration includes a semester at Westmont in San Francisco (formerly the Urban Program). Relatively few students have chosen the SIHC concentration; indeed, students need not have any particular concentration in mind. So the department has not been in any significant conversation with OCP regarding major requirements.

Philosophy Department faculty have not served on Westmont's Europe Semester or England Semester in recent years, so the department has not offered GE or other courses under the aegis of those programs.

That is to say, the Philosophy Department has little to report at present in connection with the office of Off-Campus Programs.

### 6. Disability Services

The Philosophy Department has occasionally referred a student to the office of Disability Services, and, more often, been informed of a student who has need of special considerations—typically, more time for examinations. Disability Services has been happy to proctor exams in cases like these, and it has been well organized, sending timely reminders to the professors providing the exams and promptly returning completed exams to them. Disability Services has carried out its work in a professional and discreet way. The Philosophy Department does not have any particular suggestions for the office but is nonetheless grateful for its service to students.

### C. Staffing Resources

#### 1. Administrative Assistant

The Philosophy Department shares an administrative assistant with the Religious Studies Department. Since [fall 2008] Victoria Leon has held this position; during 2007-08 the administrative assistant was Shane Beninga; and during the period 2005-07 Jennifer Hauser. Ms. Leon reports that a substantial majority of her work is for the Religious Studies Department. The Philosophy Department in general makes fewer demands on the assistant, though there are occasional projects (e.g., preparation for the 2012 meeting of the Mountain/Pacific Division of the Society of Christian Philosophers) that require a large amount of administrative assistance. This is not surprising given that Religious Studies Department has nine full-time members as compared to the Philosophy Department's three. The Philosophy Department has generally paid one third the cost of general-use office supplies and the like, Religious Studies paying the other two thirds.

The assistant has typically hired two or three students to further assist in running the Philosophy/Religious Studies office and working on various projects for members of those faculties. This may serve as a rough indicator of the workload of the position.

All things considered the Philosophy Department has been satisfied with the present arrangement, i.e., with a single assistant shared by two departments, and with student assistants hired to lighten the assistant's load. Members of the department have not commented on any drawbacks of the arrangement or proposed any alternatives to it. It is possible that future changes could make sharing an assistant more difficult (e.g., if the two departments were no longer in the same location), but at present the Philosophy Department finds the arrangement to be workable.

#### 2. Faculty

As noted elsewhere, the Philosophy Department consists of three full-time members. Various adjunct instructors have been hired over the years (see Appendix B). In a typical non-sabbatical year two courses have been taught by adjuncts, though the number varies (see Appendix C). One regular adjunct has been Christian Hoeckley, the director of Westmont's Gaede Institute for the Liberal Arts. Most other adjunct instructors have been graduate students at UC Santa Barbara or one-year sabbatical replacements.

The Philosophy Department believes that one of the most significant improvements that could be made to the philosophy program at Westmont is the hiring of additional full-time faculty. Two of the principal reasons for this (noted in section 4A3) have to do with the scope of the curriculum and the size of Philosophical Perspectives sections.

#### a) Scope of the Curriculum

Westmont lists fewer philosophy classes than every other school in the comparison group of CCCU and California liberal arts schools. In fact, the number of courses listed is barely above half the average of the others. Students would be served well by a greater variety of regular course offerings. (For potential courses noteworthy in this regard, see section 4A3 and Appendix F.)

Greater course variety would benefit all students, but particularly majors considering graduate training. In some cases graduate programs to which Westmont students have unsuccessfully applied in recent years have pointed out that their successful applicants were preferred primarily because they had more philosophy units to their credit. A broader curriculum would make Westmont applicants more competitive by allowing them to take more courses than they could otherwise.

#### b) Size of Philosophical Perspectives

The American Philosophical Association identifies a number of student benefits to small class sizes: greater student/faculty interaction, more specific feedback, more opportunity for writing, and improved settings for genuine dialogue. The size of Philosophical Perspectives, which is currently capped at 40 students and accounts for 40% of the department's teaching load, is far from ideal. In the judgment of the department, it is at present too large for carrying on effective discussions. A larger faculty would help move class sizes toward the ideal, and the advantages for students would be significant.

In addition to those noted earlier, there are several other reasons to think that students would benefit from a larger philosophy faculty.

#### c) Diversity

All current members of the Philosophy Department are Caucasian males—fine fellows, to be sure, but collectively less diverse than is preferable. Hiring additional faculty would potentially allow the department to more attractive and welcoming to women and/or minority students, and to serve as a better model of the unity in diversity to which the Christian community is called.

In particular, hiring a woman might enable the department to better serve a large segment of the student body. In recent years the department has been pleased to see that approximately 1 in 3 philosophy majors is a woman. This is not atrocious for a male-dominated

discipline, but given that the male-to-female ratio of the student body is roughly 1:2, the department believes that it can do better.

The timing may be especially good for a diversity hire. As noted in the department's most recent diversity report, several women and minorities have been identified as potential candidates, and several of these we expect to be on the job market in the next few years. Karen Chan and Naomi Luce are both graduate students at the University of Notre Dame who specialize in areas not already saturated by the current philosophy faculty (history of philosophy and continental philosophy, respectively). Also, two Westmont alumnae, Krista Rodkey and Amy Seymour, are PhD candidates in strong philosophy programs, and it is very likely that both will soon be looking for teaching positions.

#### d) Faculty Load

The connection that the American Philosophical Association sees between faculty load and meaningful feedback for students has already been noted. Also noted (in section 4A3) is the consistently above-average load of the philosophy faculty. While the class size of non-GE courses is relatively small, Philosophical Perspectives alone accounts for 40% of the philosophy faculty's course offerings, and all GE courses open to non-majors account for approximately 50%. Additional hiring (the more the better) would decrease the faculty load and would make a palpable difference to students.

#### e) Adjunct Faculty

As discussed earlier, adjunct faculty have become an increasingly regular part of the department's staffing strategy. In each of the past six years some adjuncts have taught philosophy classes, and often more than one (see Appendix B). The current arrangement does not give the department enough flexibility to cover regularly taught classes with regular faculty when one of them is on sabbatical or has a course release for professional development. Though the department has been happy with the quality of its adjunct instruction, the continuity that comes with full-time faculty would facilitate deeper ongoing relationships with students and might also affect the number of students who choose to major in philosophy. From an admissions perspective, a high proportion of full-time faculty is an advantage. Finally, the ongoing availability of suitable, high-quality adjunct faculty is not a given.

The reasons offered above suggest that Westmont students would benefit significantly from the hiring of additional full-time philosophy faculty. It should also be noted, however, that a larger faculty will be crucial if Westmont is to offer a philosophy program befitting an institution at the "next level," i.e., an institution of the sort that Westmont aspires to be. At present the curriculum size, student/faculty ratio, lack of diversity, and faculty size itself are more typical of what one would expect to find in a "basic" program than in a top-flight philosophy program. On the other hand, real and noteworthy improvements in several different aspects of the program could be garnered if additional faculty were hired.

## 7. Conclusion and Long-Term Vision

### A. Major departmental accomplishments

When considering the department's most notable accomplishments over the past six years it seems natural to think first of its role in its students' accomplishments. Well over a thousand students have taken Philosophical Perspectives and, if the assessment results are indeed accurate, have grown appreciably in their ability to understand philosophical issues and the bearing of those issues on the rest of their education. Many students have expressed their appreciation for the broader vision of the world that Perspectives has given them. Many who may have felt intimidated at the outset of the class later find that they are able to think clearly about the big questions they encounter outside of class without the trepidation they would once have had.

The department's majors and their accomplishments, though not discussed elsewhere in this report, appear especially noteworthy. Sixty students have graduated with degrees in philosophy in the last six years (see Appendix D). A number have completed Major Honors projects. Three (Krista Rodkey, Amy Seymour, and Matt Duncan) are now completing PhD programs in philosophy, and several current and recent students are considering such programs. Even those who do not pursue an honors project or an advanced degree often speak with deep appreciation for the skills and perspectives they have gained through their philosophical studies. Former students have brought critical and analytic skills gained at Westmont into such professions as law, business, and ministry; others have brought them to graduate study in other fields. Difficult as these things are to measure, it seems that the department's contribution to these students' development must be noted among the department's best accomplishments.

As described in section 5, one of the department's most consistent teaching results is that students in Philosophical Perspectives are able to describe the bearing of philosophy on the Christian liberal arts (and hence, on their education). Attention to this outcome led the department to consider what texts and classroom tools might be most appropriate for helping students in this area, and since that time students have met the outcome with a high degree of regularity. This result affirms that the department is successfully carrying out a significant component of its mission.

Also noted in section 5 are the various efforts the department has made in establishing its assessment goals, outcomes, and tools. It has been a long process with a number of false starts and dead ends. Nonetheless the department has come a long way, typically in the right direction. The department has a revised mission statement and revised outcomes; it has a consistent pattern for the evaluation of its GE outcomes; and it has a plan for future assessment that is clearly more sustainable than its previous approach had been. The process is not yet complete. Still, the department is now much closer to reaching an assessment regime in its final form (to the extent that such things can be final).

## B. Long-term Vision

Four items that have come to the fore in the department's planning for the next six years involve staffing, curricular changes, assessment tools, and the Wennberg Scholarship.

### a) Staffing

The case for hiring additional faculty was made in section 6. The department is aware that financial constraints make it difficult to plan with confidence on hiring new faculty. The department does, however, see this as a key step to building on the strengths of the department and bringing about meaningful improvements.

### b) Curricular Changes

A number of questions have been raised above about whether the philosophy curriculum might be profitably changed. Comparison with similar schools suggests that Westmont's philosophy curriculum should be broader than it is. The nature of several individual courses (those with conjunctive names, like 'Modern and Contemporary Philosophy' and 'Critical Reasoning and Logic') raises the question whether such courses are better taught as two rather than as one. If the department begins to offer upper-division courses less frequently than they are currently offered, additional courses will need to be added in any case. It is also likely that the number of courses required in the major would need to increase, a matter that has bearing on the number of students willing and able to become philosophy majors.

These are large questions regarding the structure of the major program. The department's plan is to consider them carefully, since so far it has raised the questions without coming to any clearly satisfying answer. Naturally the results of its staffing efforts will have a significant bearing on what the best answers to the curricular questions are.

### c) Assessment Tools

The department has not yet devised shared rubrics for its GE and major program evaluation; doing so is high on the list of goals for its assessment process. The department also has yet to choose benchmarks for its major program outcomes. The department's plan is to fill in these gaps during the next assessment cycle.

### d) Wennberg Scholarship

After Bob Wennberg's death a number of alumni and friends of the college inquired about making donations to the college to honor Bob. It was eventually decided that the money currently set aside for the annual Wennberg Award to a suitable senior student would instead be added to other gifts to fund a new Wennberg Scholarship to be given to a promising junior or senior philosophy student who demonstrated the clarity, dexterity, wisdom, grace, and good humor called for in the Wennberg Award criteria.



Shortly before this report was completed, the department was asked to name the scholarship's first recipient. It named Christopher Kyle, an outstanding senior philosophy major. Since the process of awarding scholarships is now underway, the department's plans are no longer long-term plans. Still, the department's plans still include setting a regular schedule and clearly identified criteria for awarding the new scholarship, and coordinating its communication with the Donor Relations office.

### C. Next Steps

#### a) Staffing

The first step has been to make a case for hiring additional faculty; that step has begun in this report and will be continued and amended as necessary in future annual reports and the like. The department will discuss its plans together at departmental meetings, but the chair will have primary responsibility for writing the aforementioned reports and communicating with the provost's office. The department Diversity Recruitment Specialist (currently Dr. Nelson) will continue to lead the search for promising women and minority candidates, and the chair (Dr. Vander Laan) will attend a conference on hiring and retaining a diverse faculty in the fall of 2011.

#### b) Curricular Changes

The department will consider the curricular questions it faces together at department meetings and possibly a departmental retreat. This process will begin in earnest in the spring of 2012, after it has received feedback on its staffing plans and after it has hosted the 2012 meeting of the Mountain/Pacific Division of the Society of Christian Philosophers. An initial goal will be to determine whether the course rotation should be changed or additional courses should be added prior to the spring scheduling of the 2012-13 academic year.

#### c) Assessment Tools

The department will draft assessment rubrics during the next year that each GE and major program goal is assessed (see Multi-year Plan below). The chair will either draft a rubric for discussion by the department in its regular meetings or will delegate that task to another member of the department. Benchmarks for major program outcomes will likewise be selected in the year of their evaluation. The department will discuss the possibilities; individual faculty members will determine which benchmarks best suits the courses they teach.

#### d) Wennberg Scholarship

Dr. Taylor will continue to serve as the communication link between the department and Donor Relations. The department will discuss the disbursement schedule at a department meeting no later than this coming March so that it can be coordinated with the choice of each year's recipient of the Outstanding Senior Award.

### D. Multi-year Plan

The department's multi-year assessment plan is located in Appendix H (Chart 7). It specifies the anticipated year of assessment for the department's major and GE goals.