WESTMONT
Philosophy

MEMORANDUM

Date: Tuesday, May 29, 2018

To: Mark Sargent, Provost, & Tatiana Nazarenko, Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness

Cc: Mark Nelson & David Vander Laan

From: Jim Taylor, Philosophy Department Chair

RE: Philosophy Department Action Plan & Multi-year Assessment Plan with Key Questions

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Action Plan. We will be looking carefully together at the following areas for potential change listed on the "Action Plan for a Six-Year Program Review Cycle" form—in the following order of priority:

(Item 6) *"Other important changes"* will include changes to our strategies for the recruitment and retention of majors and minors.
- Rationale and evidence: As we indicated in our 6-year report, we have recently faced significant challenges recruiting and retaining philosophy majors and minors. The external reviewer and Program Review Committee have recommended a strategy for addressing these challenges (see the "Program Sustainability and Adaptability" section of the PRC's report to us of 2/8/2018). As a result, we have made our **Key Question #1 "What strategies should we implement to recruit and retain more philosophy majors and minors?"**
- Six-year timeline: Because of the importance and urgency of this matter, we started implementing the recommended strategy this past academic year, and we will be proactive about maintaining and improving it each year for the next six years.
- Who is in charge: All three of the full-time members of our department will be in charge of this process, and our three part-time adjuncts will assist us.

(Item 1) In the *"Curriculum/program"* area, we will be discussing possible changes to our senior capstone experience (currently a four-unit Senior Seminar course).
- Rationale and evidence: After the faculty voted to eliminate the "Integrating the Major Discipline" GE requirement, we began to discuss alternatives to our 4-unit Philosophy Senior Seminar course as a capstone experience for our graduating senior majors (which had satisfied that GE requirement along with the GE "Writing-Intensive Course Within the Major" requirement). We included a question about Senior Seminar on our Alumni Survey concerning whether it should be more theoretical or practical in orientation (it has been primarily theoretical in focus). Since a nearly equal number of alums recommended

each of these alternatives, we are considering designing a capstone experience that combines theoretical and practical components. Our **Key Question #2 is "What kind of theoretical and practical capstone experience/course should we require of our graduating senior majors?"**

- Six-year timeline: We plan to address this question primarily in the spring semester of 2019 (next spring) after Taylor is back from his sabbatical (and before Nelson takes his sabbatical the following year).
- Who is in charge: All three of the full-time philosophy faculty will participate in this process (though Taylor as chair will be the main point person).

(Item 1) In the *"Curriculum/program"* area, we will also be considering possible new upper division courses and collaborations with other departments (e.g., cross-listed courses and/or interdisciplinary tracks or majors).

- Rationale and evidence: As we stated in our 6-year report, our upper-division course offerings are relatively limited in comparison with other undergraduate philosophy programs. We think we could draw more students to our major if we were able to offer a broader range of courses. However, we are a small department with limited resources. In their response to our 6-year report, the PRC recommended that we consider using our adjuncts to expand our course offerings, work with other departments to cross-list upper division courses with them, and consider collaborating on a PPE (Philosophy, Politics, and Economics) track or interdisciplinary major. Our **Key Question #3 is "How can we broaden our major by adding new upper-division courses and/or by collaborating with other departments on cross-listing courses and/or developing interdisciplinary majors?"**
- Six-year timeline: On our new Multi-Year Assessment Plan, we have scheduled the 2019-2020 academic year as the primary time we will focus on this key question.
- Who is in charge: All three of the full-time philosophy faculty will participate in this process (though Taylor as chair will be the main point person).

(Item 6) *"Other important changes"* will also include changes to the way we grade essays (for enhanced inter-grader reliability, improved communication with students, and decreased burden on each individual instructor).

- Rationale and evidence: In recent department meetings, the three of us have each expressed a desire to improve the process by means of which we grade philosophical essays (which are the primary instrument of evaluation in our discipline). We have not yet taken the time to compare our assessments of the same student essays to check for inter-grader reliability. And we are eager to learn from each other and from other sources about better ways to communicate our assessments to our students. Finally, each of us feels burdened by the amount of time we spend grading essays and also by the lack of confidence we sometimes feel about our evaluative judgments of them. Consequently, our **Key Question #4 is "How can we improve our essay-assessment processes so as to improve inter-grader reliability, communication with students, and the efficiency and effectiveness of our evaluative efforts?"**
- Six-year timeline: On our new Multi-Year Assessment Plan, we have scheduled the 2021-2022 academic year as the primary time we will focus on this key question.

- Who is in charge: All three of the full-time philosophy faculty will participate in this process (though Taylor as chair will be the main point person).

(Item 2) In the *"Initiatives to improve teaching and learning"* area, we will be discussing ways to help our students do better relative to our three PLOs: (1) With respect to the Knowledge PLO, a list of items enough of which we would like our students to show us they know adequately by the time they graduate; (2) With respect to the Skills PLO, more explicit attention paid to argument evaluation and construction in all of our courses; and (3) With respect to the Virtues PLO, the possibility of requiring all of our majors to take our new Intellectual Virtues & Civil Discourse course.
- Rationale and evidence: These topics for ongoing discussion emerged out of our PLO assessment activities and conversations during the previous six-year cycle. Though we have been satisfied with our students learning relative to the Knowledge PLO (in that each of them has demonstrated philosophical knowledge of some sort or other), we have wondered whether we should identify a brief more specific list of things we want all of them to know enough of by the time they graduate. Also, our Skills PLO assessments have indicated that our students need to improve in argument construction and evaluation (as opposed to argument recognition and understanding). Finally, we have been looking for ways to incorporate more focus on intellectual virtues for our Virtues PLO, and we are wondering whether the recent "Intellectual Virtues & Civil Discourse" course developed by Taylor should be required of our majors as a vehicle for that purpose.
- Six-year timeline: On our new Multi-Year Assessment Plan, we have scheduled 2018-2019 for the Skills PLO, 2020-2021 for the Virtues PLO, and 2022-2023 for the Knowledge PLO.
- Who is in charge: All three of the full-time philosophy faculty will participate in this process (though Taylor as chair will be the main point person).

(Item 4) As for *"Learning outcomes that the department will assess in the subsequent years,"* we will need to work with the General Education committee and other relevant departments to schedule assessments for the GELOs our GE courses include (Philosophical Reflections, Reasoning Abstractly, and now with the addition of PHI 137, Understanding Society and Thinking Globally). We will also need to work with this committee and those departments to make sure that we are using the same rubrics to assess student work in these areas (in some cases these rubrics will need to be developed or revised).
- Rationale and evidence: We indicated in our 6-year report that this collaborative work with the GE committee and other relevant departments remains to be done. In the PRC response to our report, we were encouraged to follow up on this unfinished business.
- Six-year timeline: We have scheduled our Philosophical Perspectives assessment for 2019-2020 (since that's the year the GE Committee will conduct the Philosophical Reflections on Truth & Value assessment). And we have scheduled our Reasoning Abstractly assessment for 2020-2021 (since that is apparently when the GE Committee will be engaging in the assessment of that GELO—although Reasoning Abstractly is also listed in the 2018-2019 academic year on the GE Committee assessment schedule, so we will have to confirm which year it will actually take place).
- Who is in charge: All three of the full-time philosophy faculty will participate in this process (though Taylor as chair will be the main point person).