

Minutes from Philosophy's end-of-the-year assessment meeting - 9 May 2011

The Philosophy faculty (Huenemann, Kleiner, McGonagill, Sherlock, and Steinhoff) met on Friday, May 6th, to assess their grading of student papers and to reflect on the Philosophy program.

1. Each faculty member selected three student papers from a class to share with two other faculty members. We discussed the quality of each paper and what grade should be assigned. We found large agreement across the faculty, and discussed the extent to which mechanics figure into a paper's grade. This year there was some confusion over who was reading whose papers, so next year we need to make an extra effort to make this clearer. Also, we will try to arrange the paper sharing to take into account faculty's teaching/research interests.

2. Kleiner provided some data regarding the GPAs of our majors. It seems that our majors' and minors' GPAs are generally higher in the Philosophy program than they are overall, or in their Gen Ed classes, or in their second majors. It was roundly agreed that this is an urgent problem needing attention. We agreed upon the following actions:

- a. Faculty will try to grade with greater rigor and scrutiny;
- b. In classes where it is appropriate, faculty will include with their syllabi a version of our program's "Philosophy Writing Scoring Guide," so that students are aware up front of the increased rigor of our grading;
- c. In next spring's meeting, each faculty member will present grade distributions for the upper-division classes taught over the year, and explain cases where the GPA seems higher than it ought to be.

The faculty was grateful to Kleiner for gathering this data and sharing it with us.

3. We discussed whether to add other options to our Metaphysics/Epistemology requirement for the major. It was decided to leave the requirement as is but allow exceptions in cases of need.

4. We discussed scheduling difficulties encountered for Fall 2011, when two core classes required for the major have been scheduled for the same time. We will try to avoid this in the future. This may mean offering some classes at "off" times, such as early morning or late afternoon/early evening.

5. We discussed requiring a senior project for our majors. It was proposed that we present to our students who have completed (or have nearly completed) their coursework for the Philosophy major a senior project that can be met in one of three ways:

- I. "Thesis" option:** the student will complete PHIL 4990 (3 credits) with a faculty member and write a longish essay (around 20 pages), suitable for publication in an undergraduate journal, on an agreed-upon topic.
- II. "Live and Learn" option:** the student will complete PHIL 4990 (3 credits) with a faculty member and undertake a project which in some way

documents or expresses the relevance of their philosophical studies to an important issue of contemporary life. Students must work out the details of the project, including grading criteria, with a faculty member.

III. "Extra class" option: the student will complete an additional 4000-level class (not 4990).

This will make the Philosophy major 33 rather than 30 credits, but that number is still relatively low compared to other major programs in the college. The faculty affirmed the proposal, and would like to see it implemented for students declaring their major in Fall 2011 and afterward. Huenemann will work with S. Winn to have it included in our major requirement sheets.

6. It was decided that, early next year, we should review and probably revise our program's learning objectives.

7. The meeting was adjourned, amidst general hoopla and mutual congratulation.