

**Department of Philosophy  
University of New Mexico  
Graduate Programs  
Plan for Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

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**A. College, Department and Date**

1. College: College of Arts and Sciences
2. Department: Philosophy
3. Date: 7 January 2009

**B. Academic Program of Study**

M.A., Philosophy

**C. Contact Person(s) for the Assessment Plan**

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**D. Broad Program Goals & Measurable Student Learning Outcomes**

**1. Broad Program Learning Goals for the M.A. in Philosophy**

The graduate programs in philosophy are aimed at broadening and deepening the knowledge of philosophy that our students began to acquire at the undergraduate level while at the same time guiding them in focusing on a particular area of specialization. The ultimate aim of the graduate programs is to enable students to produce original research in some area of philosophy which will potentially contribute to the advancement of the discipline. To that end, the further development of written and oral communication skills is essential. Through the completion of our programs, our graduate students are also exposed to the expectations and demands of a professional career in academic philosophy.

Given these general aims, many of the broad learning goals are the same for both the M.A. and Ph.D. programs. However, we expect the level of knowledge, the development of communication skills, and the originality and creativity of the research of our Ph.D. students to significantly exceed those of our M.A. students, who are typically in our department for only two years.

Knowledge of Philosophy: Given that all our graduate students must complete the “background core” requirements described above, and given as well that most of our in-coming students have an undergraduate degree in philosophy, we expect that the students entering our graduate programs will already have a broad knowledge of both the history of philosophy and the different problem areas of philosophy (such as ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology). Our goal in our graduate programs is to broaden and deepen their knowledge of philosophy by offering graduate seminars that emphasize (1) the relationship between the different problem areas of philosophy and the history of philosophy, and (2) the problems that dominate contemporary philosophy.

In regard to (1), graduate students must complete at least one seminar, and in most cases will complete several seminars, dedicated to a central figure or an important movement in the history of philosophy. In these seminars, graduate students are expected to do close and careful readings of

primary texts, but they are also expected to stay mindful of how the works of central historical figures gave rise to problems in contemporary philosophy. For instance, when discussing Descartes' *Meditations*, students are expected to understand the context in which this landmark text was written and know, for instance, that Descartes was responding to the Scholastic philosophy of the early seventeenth century as they try to interpret the text. But they are also encouraged to remain aware of how Descartes' suggestions regarding human knowledge, free will, and the existence of God helped motivate many of the central questions that continue to shape discussions in contemporary epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics.

In regard to (2), graduate students must complete at least one course in each of the main problem areas of philosophy, namely, metaphysics, ethics, and the theory of knowledge. In these seminars, students are exposed to recent literature that addresses some of the problems that characterize contemporary philosophy. For instance, recent seminars have addressed the current popularity of "contextualism" in epistemology, the importance of Kantian themes in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century ethics, and recent metaphysical attempts to explain causation and the nature of space and time by appeal to science. Moreover, by completing the Proseminar requirement (a 1-credit course that serves as an introduction to graduate study in our department), our graduate students are introduced to the contributions our faculty members are making to the contemporary philosophical landscape. Recent faculty presentations have focused on current debates in Indian Philosophy, Kierkegaard scholarship, and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Continental philosophy.

Ability to Carry Out Philosophical Research: In the course of studying the history and the different systematic areas of philosophy in greater breadth and depth students naturally find themselves drawn to certain figures or philosophical issues about which they believe they have something unique and interesting to say. Students at this point are expected, with the mentorship of individual faculty in independent studies and in chosen seminars, to begin to develop expertise in a chosen area of specialization that will eventually serve as the basis for writing a work of original philosophical research. Students must master the primary and secondary literature of the problem or figure in which they are interested, acquiring whatever technical skills may be necessary to comprehend that literature. They must learn to formulate a clear thesis that articulates an interpretation of the thought of a particular philosophical figure or the solution of a particular philosophical problem. They must be able to relate their thesis to current secondary literature, explaining among other things how their project constitutes an original contribution to the field. They should be able to develop their thesis thoroughly, rigorously, and at length, laying the historical and/or theoretical groundwork for it, constructing a comprehensive argument for it, and defending it against possible objections.

Scholarship Skills: Essential to being able to carry out philosophical research are two fundamental skills that graduate students must develop throughout the course of their studies: the ability to write publishable papers and the ability to communicate ideas orally, whether in general seminar discussions or via paper presentations.

In regard to their written work, we set the standards very high in our graduate seminars and expect students to compose research papers that reflect their knowledge of primary texts, their understanding of the problems emerging from the texts, and their ability to propose novel ways for addressing these problems. Doing so, of course, requires that our students know how to craft a clear and well-organized paper, but they must also be able to articulate their ideas in a way that meets the standards of professional philosophy. In particular, they must be able to motivate the problems they address (usually by appeal to current debates in contemporary scholarship), and argue for the novelty and effectiveness of the approach they wish to defend. We expect our students to hone these skills by applying feedback they receive from faculty members and also by applying principles of writing learned from reading secondary literature to their own written work.

We also want our students to develop their abilities to communicate orally. We thus encourage our graduate students to actively participate in seminar discussions and also, in some cases, require that they prepare presentations and lead the seminar on a chosen day. All our graduate students must also complete oral examinations during the course of their studies. Our M.A. students must, in particular, orally defend a research paper.

Knowledge of Professional Philosophy: In addition to broadening and deepening our students' knowledge of philosophy, providing them with the basic scholarly skills necessary for carrying out philosophical research, and guiding them in producing a work of original scholarship, we want to introduce our graduate students to the standards and conventions of the academic profession of philosophy. They should, for instance, know the major professional organizations and journals in philosophy, the journals that publish papers in their area of specialization, and the annual conferences where they can present their research. Though much of this knowledge is passed on to students through mentoring by faculty in independent study and thesis and dissertation work, we have recently added a new session to our annual Proseminar ("A Beginner's Guide to Professional Philosophy") that, among other things, introduces students to the major philosophical organizations as well as outlets for presenting and publishing their work.

Moreover, we want our students to be familiar with the professional standards of publication and conference presentation. Our students will gain much of this knowledge by reading secondary literature in their fields and by attending the talks that are part of our colloquium series. We also actively encourage and financially support our students attending and reading papers at national meetings of the American Philosophical Association.

We want our students to be prepared for the next stage of their professional career in philosophy. If they are M.A. students moving on to a Ph.D. program, our students should know how to prepare a professional CV, write a statement of research interests, and compose letters of application for an academic position. Though much of this knowledge is gained from consulting with a faculty advisor, these skills are also covered in our annual Proseminar.

Values: We wish to inculcate two values of particular importance for graduate students in philosophy: *intellectual independence* and *intellectual integrity*. Intellectual independence is the resolve to take upon oneself all that is necessary to become an expert in one's chosen field. Although one should certainly seek guidance from faculty mentors, one recognizes, in the end, that philosophy is in large part a solitary quest bounded only by one's own desire and ability, and that philosophers of substance are largely self-taught. Successful graduate students should be committed to acquiring on their own, without external guidelines or limits, whatever knowledge and skills are necessary to excel in their areas of specialization.

Intellectual integrity is a commitment to openness and honesty in the pursuit of knowledge. It includes a willingness to recognize when one has made a mistake or failed adequately to comprehend an idea and to make appropriate corrections; the courage to take risks – to advance theses, for instance, which could turn out to be wrong; and the perseverance to keep working on the solution of a problem until one gets it right. Intellectual integrity is the very heart of philosophy; it is the virtue that yields philosophical results of substance and moves the discipline forward.

Given the distinctive character of our department, there is another value that we seek to cultivate in our graduate programs. Many if not most philosophy departments that offer graduate degrees focus entirely on the Western philosophical tradition and emphasize either the history of philosophy, analytic philosophy, or Continental philosophy. Our department cannot be classified in this way. While many of our faculty members are trained primarily in Western philosophy, we have a

distinctive strength in non-Western/Asian philosophy, and our faculty members have a diverse set of interests and specialties that span the history of philosophy and trends in contemporary analytic and Continental philosophy. Given the distinctive character of our department, and thus, the distinctive character of our course offerings at the graduate level, we want our graduate students to develop an appreciation for the diversity of approaches that one can adopt when addressing philosophical problems.

***Learning goals specific to the M.A. in Philosophy***

By developing the knowledge, skills, and values listed above, we want our M.A. students to be prepared for further study of philosophy. In particular, we want them to have a solid understanding of what will be expected of them, both as scholars and professionals, if they continue their study of philosophy at the doctoral-level. For students who seek a terminal M.A. degree and do not intend to pursue further graduate study, the goal of the M.A. program is to offer further opportunity to pursue an interest in a particular area of philosophy developed at the undergraduate level or simply to pursue knowledge for its own sake. (Philosophy is distinct from other areas of study in that students frequently pursue it without any conscious economic objective! Aristotle was the first to comment on this – and to suggest that it is indicative of the unique value of philosophy.)

**2. List of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for the M.A. in Philosophy**

- A.1.** Students can explain, both in discussion and in writing, the main problems of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics in depth, appropriate to a teacher of philosophy at the college level.
- A.2.** Students can give, both in discussion and in writing, an overview of the current state of knowledge and research in a chosen field of specialization, referencing both major primary works and important secondary sources.
- A.3.** Students can formulate a thesis expressing an interpretation of the thought of a particular figure in the history of philosophy or the solution to a particular problem in contemporary philosophy.
- B.1.** Students can write a publishable philosophy paper.
- B.2.** Students can present a paper at a professional conference, preferably one of the national meetings of the American Philosophical Association.
- B.3.** Students can compose a work of original philosophical research built around a clearly articulated thesis and constituting, arguably, a contribution to a particular field of philosophical study.

**Note:** Given that the goal of the M.A. program is to prepare students to pursue further graduate work in Philosophy, it is not expected that M.A. students will demonstrate the same level of proficiency as Ph.D. students in their achievement of the above SLOs.

**E. Assessment of Student Learning Three-Year Plan**

**1. Student Learning Outcomes**

Relationship to UNM Student Learning Goals (insert the program SLOs and check all that apply):

<b>University of New Mexico Student Learning Goals</b>				
<b>Program SLOs</b>	Knowledge	Skills	Responsibility	Program SLO is conceptually different from university goals.
A.1. Students can explain, both in discussion and in writing, the main problems of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics in depth, appropriate to a teacher of philosophy at the college level.	X	X		
A.2. Students can give, both in discussion and in writing, an overview of the current state of knowledge and research in a chosen field of specialization, referencing both major primary works and important secondary sources.	X	X		
A.3. Students can formulate a thesis expressing an interpretation of the thought of a particular figure in the history of philosophy or the solution of a particular problem in contemporary philosophy.	X			
B.1. Students can write a publishable philosophy paper.		X		
B.3. Students can compose a work of original philosophical research built around a clearly articulated thesis and constituting, arguably, a contribution to a particular field of philosophical study.		X		

## 2. How will learning outcomes be assessed?

### A. What:

- i. *For each SLO, briefly describe the means of assessment, i.e., what samples of evidence of learning will be gathered or measures used to assess students' accomplishment of the learning outcomes in the three-year plan?*

The Philosophy Department faculty has identified two kinds of measurement tools as most useful in assessing the achievement of the above-described learning objectives among our graduate students: **(1) Portfolios**, i.e., sets of writing assignments that individual students completed to satisfy degree requirements, and **(2) Evaluations of final oral presentations of research**.

Our M.A. program culminates in the writing and defense of a work of original philosophical scholarship, the M.A. thesis or Plan II paper. In addition, students will have written substantial papers in each of the seminars they have taken satisfying distribution requirements. The faculty also remain confident in the "oral defense" of the M.A. paper as an effective measure of not only the student's knowledge of his/her area of specialization but also of the field of philosophy as a whole – since in the defense the student must typically show how his/her thesis relates to relevant problem areas as well as the history of philosophy – and, not least of all, of his/her skill as a philosophical interlocutor.

### M.A. PROGRAM

#### **SLOs A.2, A.3, B.1, B.3**

**(1) Portfolios.** Every M.A. student, in his/her last semester, will be asked to assemble a portfolio consisting of: (1) three papers submitted for courses that satisfy distribution requirements in the history of philosophy, metaphysics, ethics, or the theory of knowledge; (2) the M.A. thesis or Plan II paper; and (3) an updated CV that details any conference presentations and publications the student completed during his/her tenure at UNM.

#### **SLOs A.1, A.2, A.3**

##### **(2) Evaluation of final oral presentations**

Oral defenses of theses and Plan II papers by M.A. students will be evaluated by their examining committees according to a standard rubric, which will measure: ability to articulate the thesis of the research, ability to field and respond to questions, ability to defend the thesis against objections, etc.

- ii. *Indicate whether each measure is **direct** or **indirect**.*

Portfolios: Direct measure

Evaluation of oral presentations: Direct measure

- iii. *Briefly describe the **criteria for success** related to each direct or indirect means of assessment. What is the program's performance target (e.g., is an "acceptable or better" performance by 60% of students on a given measure acceptable to the program faculty)? If scoring rubrics are used to define qualitative criteria and measure performance, attach them to the plan as they are available.*

**Portfolios:** Given that the ultimate goal of our graduate students is to write a publishable paper, the scoring rubric that will be used for assessing each paper in the portfolio is modeled on the general rubric used by Philosophy journals during the blind review process. (The specific rubric we've used as a model is from the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.) See Appendix 1 below.

In addition to assessing each paper included in the portfolio, each faculty member will give each portfolio an overall assessment based on the scores generated using the rubric. See Appendix 2 for the portfolio scoring sheet.

Our target is to have average scores for our M.A. students fall between 3 (good) and 4 (excellent) for at least 3/4 of the questions, i.e., for three of the four items listed on the portfolio scoring sheet.

**Oral Presentations:** Oral defenses of theses and Plan II papers by M.A. students will be evaluated by their examining committees according to a standard rubric, which will measure: ability to articulate the thesis of the research, ability to field and respond to questions, ability to defend the thesis against objections, etc. See Appendix 3 below for the oral exam assessment rubric.

M.A. students will be rated according to four items and can earn a score from 1 (unacceptable) to 4 (excellent). Our target is to have average scores fall between 3 (good) and 4 (excellent) for at least 3/4 of the questions, i.e., for three of the four items listed on the rubric.

- B. Who: State explicitly whether the program's assessment will include evidence from all students in the program or a sample. Address the validity of any proposed sample of students.

**Portfolio Review:** All M.A. students will be asked to compile portfolios upon completing their degree requirements.

**Oral Presentations:** The oral defenses of all M.A. students will be assessed.

**3. When will learning outcomes be assessed? When and in what forum will the results of the assessment be discussed?**

Given the relatively low number of M.A. students who graduate each year – for instance, there was only 1 in 2007 and only 1 in 2008 – we will collect M.A. portfolios as well as oral presentation assessments during AYs 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 before we begin our formal review. Given the relatively low number of Ph.D. students who graduate each year – for instance, there was 1 in 2007 and none in 2008 – we will collect Ph.D. portfolios as well as oral presentation assessments for four academic years (from fall 2008 to spring 2012) before we begin our formal review. Thus, the department will begin the assessment of its graduate programs with the assessment of its M.A. program in AY 10-11, followed by an assessment of its Ph.D. program in AY 12-13. Currently, in AY 08-09, both programs are being assessed in the framework of an Academic Program Review.

	<b>M.A. Program</b>	<b>Ph.D. Program</b>
<b>Year 1 08-09</b>	Collect portfolios and data from oral presentations	Collect portfolios and data from dissertation defenses
<b>Year 2 09-10</b>	Collect portfolios and data from oral presentations	Collect portfolios and data from dissertation defenses
<b>Year 3 10-11</b>	Portfolio Review SLOs A.2, A.3, B.1, B.3 September 2010 Due 15 Sept 2010  Evaluate Data from Oral Presentations SLOs A.1, A.2, A.3 March 2011 Due 15 April 2011	Collect portfolios and data from dissertation defenses
<b>Year 4 11-12</b>	Revise rubrics as needed; Collect portfolios and data from oral presentations	Collect portfolios and data from dissertation defenses
<b>Year 5 12-13</b>	Collect portfolios and data from oral presentations	Portfolio Review SLOs A.2, A.3, B.1, B.3 September 2012  Evaluate Data from Oral Presentations SLOs A.1, A.2, A.3, PhD.1 March 2013
<b>Year 6 13-14</b>	Collect portfolios and data from oral presentations	Revise rubrics as needed; Collect portfolios and data from dissertation defenses
<b>Year 7 14-15</b>	Portfolio Review SLOs A.2, A.3, B.1, B.3 September 2013  Evaluate Data from Oral Presentations SLOs A.1, A.2, A.3 March 2014	Collect portfolios and data from dissertation defenses



**4. What is the unit's process to analyze/interpret assessment data and use results to improve student learning?**

*Briefly describe:*

1. *Who will participate in the assessment process (the gathering of evidence, the analysis/interpretation, recommendations).*

**M.A. Portfolios**

Beginning spring 2009, the Outcomes Assessment Coordinator for Philosophy (currently Mary Domski) will collect student portfolios from M.A. students who have completed their degree requirements. The collection process will continue until fall 2010, when a committee of no less than three faculty members will review the portfolios according to a standard rubric. See Appendix 1 below. In addition to assessing each paper included in the portfolio, each faculty member will give each portfolio an overall assessment based on the scores generated using the rubric. See Appendix 2 below. The committee will then convene and draft a report on the students' performance that will be presented to the faculty as a whole at a departmental meeting prior to 15 September 2010.

**M.A. Oral Presentations**

Beginning spring 2009, the Outcomes Assessment Coordinator for Philosophy (currently Mary Domski) will collect assessment sheets from faculty who participate in the oral defenses of M.A. theses or Plan II papers. See Appendix 3 below for the oral exam assessment rubric. Then, in spring 2011, the same committee of faculty who reviewed the M.A. portfolios in fall 2010 will also review the oral exam reports of the previous four years and compile a summary report. The report will be completed by 15 April and presented to the faculty at the final faculty meeting of the spring semester.

2. *the process for consideration of the implications of assessment for change:*
  - a. *to assessment mechanisms themselves,*
  - b. *to curriculum design,*
  - c. *to pedagogy**...in the interest of improving student learning.*

At the first faculty meeting of the academic year following the assessment of one of our graduate programs (namely, fall 2011 for the M.A. program and fall 2013 for the Ph.D. program), the department as a whole will examine the data collected from the student portfolios and oral presentations and the reports compiled by the assessment committee. We will use this data and the committee recommendations as we consider possible revisions to (1) the rubrics used for the Philosophy graduate program assessment, (2) the curriculum for graduate students in Philosophy, and (3) the assignments and methods we use in the courses required for our graduate students.

3. *How, when, and to whom will recommendations be communicated?*

If the department recommends changes to the rubrics used for the Philosophy graduate program assessment, these will be communicated to the department's Outcomes Assessment Coordinator, either during a faculty meeting or by other means (e.g., via email) sometime after our first faculty meeting of the year. Any recommended changes to the curriculum for our graduate students will be communicated to the department Chair, again, either during a faculty meeting or by other means (e.g., via email) sometime after our first faculty meeting of the year. Possible changes in pedagogy will have to be considered by full-time faculty members sometime after our first faculty meeting of the year.