### Program Information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Assessed</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>David Forman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Coordinator</td>
<td>Todd Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Submitted</td>
<td>December 20, 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contact Person for This Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Todd Jones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>702 885 9263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tjones@unlv.nevada.edu">tjones@unlv.nevada.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Learning Objectives

The Philosophy Department’s began its assessment of activities in the 2017-2018 Academic year with the following department student learning outcomes in mind.:

**Goal I: To exhibit facility in the theory and practice of argumentation, reasoning, and critical thinking:** Students shall be able to:

1. Master the *practice* of reasoning well, including
   - The ability to construct clear and concise summarizations and assessments of the reasoning in complex passages by
     - Extracting their conclusions,
     - Distilling the lines of reasoning in support of those conclusions,
     - Evaluating how well such reasoning supports those conclusions.
   - The ability to construct cogent arguments for their own conclusions and to express their reasoning in a coherent and convincing manner.

2. Demonstrate knowledge of, and competence with, the *theory* of argumentation and logic through their abilities to:
   - Describe different approaches to logical theory, and to articulate their aims and scope,
   - Define and apply central concepts and techniques of logical theory,
   - Describe major results of logical theory, and
   - Sketch how to arrive at those results.

**Goal II: To demonstrate an understanding of the classics of Western philosophy from antiquity to the present:**

Students shall be able to:

- Identify major works or figures from at least three periods of the history of Western philosophy,
- Articulate and, when appropriate, compare or contrast, the overall philosophical positions taken by these works or figures,

- Summarize the major motivations or arguments for these positions,
- Present objections that have been raised or could be raised to these positions,
- Assess the relative merits of these arguments and objections.

**Goal III: To demonstrate knowledge about central problems in major branches of (non-value) contemporary philosophical theory, such as metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of science:**

Students shall be able to:

- Identify central issues or debates in at least two core areas of contemporary philosophical theory,
- Articulate and, when appropriate, compare or contrast, different views that might be taken with respect to these issues,
- Summarize major motivations or arguments for these alternative positions,
- Present significant objections that have or could be raised to these positions.
- Assess the relative merits of these arguments and objections.
Goal IV: To demonstrate knowledge about central problems in major branches of value-centered contemporary philosophical theory, such as ethics, political philosophy, and aesthetics.

Students shall be able to:
• Identify central issues or debates in an area of contemporary philosophical value theory,
• Articulate and, when appropriate, compare or contrast, different views that might be taken with respect to these issues,
• Summarize major motivations or arguments for these alternative positions,
• Present significant objections that have or could be raised to these positions, Assess the relative merits of these arguments and objections.

Goal V: To demonstrate the ability to present arguments and to discuss philosophical ideas clearly in writing and speaking.

Students shall be able to:
• Clearly articulate a thesis and make arguments for it.
• Clearly articulate what objections people might find with these arguments
• Clearly articulate alternatives to the thesis.
• Clearly articulate the merits of these arguments and objections.

In previous years, we’ve been assessing very general department goals and their contribution to UNLV’s General education UULOs. Over the next 3 years, while we continue to assess these general goals, we wanted to also assess some specific departmental issues and goals.

One of the issues we have been especially cognizant of is that, to achieve our learning objectives at all, we need to make sure that students stay involved in and then graduate from our program over the course of their college careers. Student graduation and retention is an increasingly important goal for universities and departments throughout the country. This year, we wanted to carefully assess whether our departmental retention rates are where they should be. We especially concentrated on the issue of whether our graduation rates were where one should expect them to be, given the number of our majors. If not, we planned on looking at what course requirement and/or availability bottlenecks there might be preventing students from graduating in a timely manner.

2. Measuring graduation and retention

Over the years, there had been some informal worries about philosophy graduation rates possibly being lower than they should be. In 2007 we had around 60 philosophy majors. By 2012 our numbers had dramatically increased to over 100. But it didn’t appear that graduation rates had correspondingly dramatically increased. When department members would attend Spring commencement ceremonies there would usually be only about 8 graduating philosophy major’s names read. Some of us wondered how it was that 100 majors would yield only 8 or so graduates. In previous years, it has appeared that one or
another of our course requirements might have acted as a bottleneck, preventing people who had fulfilled all of the requirements but that one from graduating for a time. But in recent years we had streamlined our requirements and there didn’t appear to be any problems of that nature. Why weren’t the graduation rates higher? Were there large numbers of “inactive” majors who had stopped taking classes at UNLV?

To find out if there were large number of students who declared as philosophy majors at UNLV, but then left the university before graduating, we undertook a thorough study, looking up statistical information, talking to students, and having discussions with people who worked in Institutional Analysis and Planning in UNLV’s Office of Decision Support.

3. What was learned

After carefully looking at all the information collected, we were pleased to find that we did not actually have many philosophy majors who were held up or “went missing” before they could graduate.

To begin with, while in many Universities and departments the vast majority of students graduate in the Spring, philosophy majors at UNLV graduate in the Spring and Fall in equal numbers. There are usually around 8 in the Spring, 8 in the fall, and there are usually around 4 in the summer as well, making for around 20 philosophy majors graduating every year.

Now at UNLV, most philosophy majors do not become majors until their junior or senior year. So a 20 person graduation rate looked to be still lower than the 50 or so that it should be with 100 junior and senior majors.

But most UNLV students take six, not four years to graduate. That would put what the graduation rate should have been closer to 33. But not all majors really are juniors and seniors. And if (as seems likely) just 1 out of every 5 majors is a freshman or sophomore, then that would leave only 80 junior and senior philosophy majors. With a six year graduation rate, this would mean that a perfect, no-loss-at-all graduation rate would be 26 students a year. Our graduation average of 20 per year means that only 6 out of 100 majors are dropping out of school, or perhaps just switching to another major. Those are actually quite low numbers. Indeed, in 2018 we had twenty seven graduating majors, indicating no clear loss of majors at all.

We also found that in the fall of 2018, 90 of our 102 majors were enrolled in philosophy classes above the 200 level. So there are not actually (as it might have appeared) large numbers of declared philosophy majors who are not taking classes at any given times. Students who are philosophy majors at UNLV are enrolled in classes and graduate at an astonishingly high rate.
In various assessments of our program, we have found numerous areas of our program we can make improvements in. But it is good to know that our retention rate is something we are doing quite well with.

It should be noted that, in addition to the graduation rates of philosophy majors, one might look at the graduation rates of what has been termed the “cohort” of incoming freshman who signal an intention to be philosophy majors upon entering UNLV. Upon looking at this data in detail, it seems clear to us, that data about cohort class doesn’t give much useful information. For numerous reasons, students likely hear very little about philosophy before entering college. It is much more common for students to become philosophy majors after having been in school for a while and been exposed to a philosopher they were interested in in an introductory philosophy class, or in a class in another subject. When students do enter UNLV as philosophy majors, the overwhelming majority to so as transfer students. But these transferring students are not included in a cohort class. With such low incoming philosophy major cohort numbers (averaging less than one per year), cohort graduation rates will invariably be misleadingly high or low. A much more important figure for us is the graduation rates of those who realized by mid-college that they will be philosophy majors and thereupon take the required Philosophy Milestone Experience Class. We will continue to monitor what happens to the students in the cohort class. But we will be looking especially expensively at the continuing progress of philosophy majors who have taken the Milestone class.

4. Closing the loop/future activities

In 2017, we concentrated on assessing whether we were succeeding in our goals concerning students knowledge of the history of philosophy. Many faculty members expressed that there seemed to be gaps in every area of student knowledge of the history of philosophy. Students’ lack of familiarity with the very important figures of Kant and Wittgenstein were mentioned as being particularly noteworthy.

Some actions were taken that we hoped would specifically help remedy these problems. One faculty member (Woodbridge) taught an entire Great Philosophers course on Wittgenstein. Another (Forman) taught an entire course on Kant.

But in discussions about whether we were succeeding in “closing the loop.” We noted that there are reasons not to be optimistic that offering specialty courses like this will solve the problem of faculty members in other courses still having to spend lots of time familiarizing students with major figures from the history of philosophy. One faculty member pointed out that just prior to period we were assessing, he had, in fact, taught a specialty course on Wittgenstein. It is likely, however, that many of the students taking the course were seniors, graduating the same semester that they took the course. This would have the result that, even after offering a specialty course on Wittgenstein, the department would still be left with remaining students who had not taken the
Wittgenstein course. The problem of *current* students not having much knowledge of Wittgenstein could easily remain.

This problem, we believe, is a consequence of a more general problem in the major. *Most* of the courses we currently offer for majors are 400 level. The major is not structured in a way that encourages students to take sequences of any sort -- either historical or sequenced from intermediate to advanced. For numerous reasons (including a small faculty), very few 200 and 300 level philosophy courses are offered. This means that philosophy students generally select from whatever advanced 400 level courses are offered that semester, whether or not they have any knowledge of the preceding eras or of prerequisite issues. When students take the courses that give them knowledge that will be extremely helpful for them in other courses, they are already pretty close to graduating.

What can done about this is a complicated matter. But we are continuing to discuss thoroughly as we create our strategic plan document. We are cognizant that fixes to one kind of problems (e.g. additional requirements) can create new problems in other areas (e.g. timely graduation). But in working on our strategic plan we certainly will be looking about what might be done regarding the top-heavy (400 level) nature of our current course offerings and requirements.

In the coming year we also plan to extensively survey graduating senior philosophy majors about various aspects of what they learned in the course of their philosophy education, and the strengths and weaknesses of the program. We now have a clear mechanism for administrating this survey and getting a good response rate: We will be requiring all students who take the (required) Philosophy Capstone course to fill out this survey as part of their participation in this course. (Discussion of this survey and the issues in will also likely be a *part of* this course.) Such a survey should give us lots of good additional information that we can use for various types of assessment.