



## Philosophy | 2015-2016 Assessment Report

1. Please give a brief overview of the assessment data you collected this year.

Students learn more about philosophy and see their own skills expand considerably when their different courses are integrated so as to foster a continuous line of learning that accompanies the learning of individual classes. The typical progression of courses in a Philosophy Program begins with Ancient Philosophy, then Medieval, then Early Modern and Modern, and finishing in a course in Contemporary Philosophy. With this benefit in mind the Philosophy program sought to investigate our first learning outcome, the extent to which students are familiar with the history of philosophy as regards its major eras and dominant thinkers and issues in each. To the extent to which students are aware of their historic progression, they are likely also stronger in the overarching skills that link our courses. Conversely, students which lack an appreciation of the broad history likely have yet to strongly integrate the skills built into a study of its natural progression.

**The Ideal:** Ideally, students would work through the historic sequence of course in their historic order. If we could insist on this specific selection and organization of courses, we could additionally tailor the assignments for each historical course to build off of the skills developed in the earlier course(s) and to also lay the groundwork for a more advanced set of skills in the courses to come.

**The Problem:** We do not have enough students to insist on this however, and too many of the students that we have enter the program at different times. There are also serious hurdles regarding student schedules and availabilities. Thus we set out an ideal and then considered our courses from the more realistic standpoint of the reality of circumstances at UW-Green Bay to see if we could improve in any way on their organization. Another aspect of the problem is that our program requires only three lower-level courses, where Ancient and Early Modern philosophy are housed. While every student must take either Ancient or Early Modern, with the plethora of other lower-level course offerings and other credit demands, many students are not able to take both.

**Process:** We relied on our current course distribution and frequencies, feedback from faculty, and interviews with outgoing students to assess this. The faculty discussed our courses and the extent to which they include others and we then had graduating students submit a questionnaire some of which dealt with their own assessment of their appreciation of the historical development of philosophy across their studies.

**Findings:** Both our Ancient and Early Modern courses are introductory. The Ancient course leans a bit more heavily on skills associated with careful reading, whereas the Early Modern course leans a bit more heavily on skills associated with writing. We feel that these course are nice complements. However, Medieval Philosophy is a 300 level course, so many students take it only after they have taken Early Modern (which breaks the historical progression). Students who have taken Medieval before taking Early Modern get more out of Early Modern but, alas, this does not happen very often.

**Another:** Our Modern Philosophy and Contemporary Philosophy courses are variable content courses, meaning that they each have at least two different possible topics of study. The Modern course, for instance, focuses on 19<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy in one iteration and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy in another. While the 19<sup>th</sup> century iteration builds off of material from Early Modern, the 20<sup>th</sup> century iteration does not. (The same goes for Contemporary Philosophy except that our Contemporary Philosophy course is almost always a topic in Contemporary Philosophy that need not have any deep relevance to philosophy's historical eras.) The upshot is that the Modern Philosophy course builds off of earlier courses in the History of Philosophy only some of the time.

**Conclusions:** Derek Jeffreys teaches a lower-level course on the Philosophy of Religion which discusses in some detail many of the topics dealt with in the more advanced Medieval Philosophy course. Thus with a bit more inclusion of the connection of ideas in this course with ideas from ancient and in Early Modern Philosophy we feel that students have access to a nice historic progression within the lower-level courses.

We need, however, to be more proactive in advising students to take these courses early and in their historic progression. Philosophy is not a program that many students enter into college intending to study however, so we need to develop techniques to attract students to Ancient Philosophy and to encourage those who enjoy the material therein to enroll in Derek's course before enrolling in Early Modern. We hope to discuss ideas to do so near the end of the summer.

**Another Conclusion:** Whether students take courses in the historical progression or not, we should be doing more to help them step away from specific courses and better appreciate their long-term growth through our program. Because of our typically smaller (but growing) course sizes, our students improve dramatically. But we believe that we can do more. Better integrating our assignments and making more frequent references to other courses and assignment skills should help to improve our students more.

2. How will you use what you've learned from the data that was collected?

**Finally:** With the recent addition to our workload (as if we were not already overworked before) we may consider offering more sections of fewer courses. This would be a shame since students report that one of the best parts of our program is the selection of course topics and offerings, but with a heavier course load one of the easier remedies is to offer more sections with fewer preps. By offering a narrower array of courses students will be more likely to take course in a historical manner. Also, fewer course offerings may make it easier to better reference other courses more frequently.