

Disciplinary Communication in Philosophy

I. Educational Objectives

Education in philosophy involves acquisition of at least two complementary skills. On the one hand, students must learn to identify and structure arguments present or implicit in what they read (including philosophers whose cultural background and stylistic modes differ greatly from one's own). On the other hand, students should have an ability to articulate either cogent questions regarding arguments or arguments of their own.

The department cultivates these skills in three ways.

Writing—Students often have to write short (3-5) pages papers on specific essays they have been assigned. These assignments require that they examine and explicate certain texts for specific argument.

Speaking/presentation—Students typically (at least in advanced undergraduate classes) are required to make presentations to the class analyzing certain essays or developing their thoughts on an assigned topic.

“Critical Listening”—Students are expected to be able to listen to the presentation of a philosophical position and then be able to formulate critical questions regarding the material that has been presented. Much teaching in the department employs a Socratic method designed to insure that students do not just passively record lectures but actively interrogate and question the material as presented.

II. How these objectives are met (or might be met) in the curriculum

At present, the Department is weighing two strategies, either or both of which might be used to satisfy the disciplinary communication objects.

Philosophy 190 (Senior seminars)

Philosophy 180 (Undergraduate Colloquium course)

At present, all majors must take at least one course numbered 190. Philosophy 180 is on the books, but not required at this time of majors. Philosophy 190 is a 5 credit course; Philosophy 180 is a 2 credit course.

How each course contributes to the objectives

Philosophy 190 as currently taught typically meets all the objectives identified. Students write regularly over the term (typically a 3-5 page paper each week); they make presentations to the seminar; active contribution to lectures and presentations are expectations of those students in the seminar. Feedback is constant over the term, and often a final research paper is required as well. Although the W requirement is satisfied by all majors by virtue of the gateway required history of philosophy courses, the Philosophy 190 experience provides a more traditional seminar setting for advanced undergraduate majors.

The Department also has under consideration allowing students to fulfill a disciplinary communications requirement by enrolling in Philosophy 180 (a 2 credit course) three times. The course requires that students attend at least three (of 4-5 per quarter) colloquia in the department. They must write 3 page papers on each colloquium presentation that they attend. In addition, students would have to attend at least three pre-colloquium sessions in which the paper to be presented would be read and discussed. A re-structuring of Philosophy 180 is under consideration that would meet all the desiderata specified under educational objectives.