A. **Program Student Learning Outcomes**

1) Philosophy majors will be able to write clear, academically rigorous, argumentative essays.

2) Philosophy majors will be able to read complex texts, create original arguments, analyze the arguments of others, and express these criticisms orally and in writing.

3) Philosophy majors will demonstrate knowledge of philosophical and/or religious traditions, their relevant concepts, theories, methods, and historical contexts.

4) Philosophy majors will develop their capacities for ethical decision-making, Socratic humility, openness to the ideas of others, reflective self-awareness, and a life-long curiosity about big questions.

5) Philosophy majors will cultivate an appreciation for a diversity of ideas and values across time and for human difference in areas such as: religion, culture, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, and gender.

B. **Program Student Learning Outcome(s) Assessed**

3) Philosophy majors will demonstrate knowledge of philosophical and/or religious traditions, their relevant concepts, theories, methods, and historical contexts.

C. **Summary of Assessment Process**

SLO #3, roughly speaking, is one of content retention within its relevant context(s). To measure this outcome, course work from PHIL 3305: Self, Nature, and God, which has traditionally been considered the “capstone course” for our majors, was selected for assessment. This course covers a range of material across both philosophical and religious traditions with coverage of a number of conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and historical contexts, and is a required course for all of our majors, making it an ideal candidate for individualized attention.
Dr. Braungardt, the instructor of record for this iteration of PHIL 3305, provided all of the instructions for each of the assignments given in his course. The assignments are varied, including individual and group work, and are built in such a way so as to encourage growth in learning throughout the quarter. Each assignment was evaluated for its capacity to act as a measure of student content knowledge. Some assignments appeared more clearly geared towards measuring that particular SLO than did others. Average grades were also provided for each assignment in order to determine the extent to which students were achieving positive outcomes against the given measures.

The department met as a group to discuss the assignments and to determine what elements, in particular, might indicate best practice in terms of measuring content knowledge. In addition to this discussion, some research was conducted in online databases for information on best practices for measuring content knowledge, but this research showed little use for our present aim, except for examples of the kinds of thinking that might be employed on different types of assignments. This research was included in the departmental discussion.

D. Summary of Assessment Results

Several key factors were identified as relating most clearly to the measurement of content knowledge among students. Most importantly, though, it was obvious that content knowledge, as it applies to the field of Philosophy, is not something that can exist on its own but is measured only within the context of more inclusive measures that will inherently include other SLOs as well.

The most classic example of measuring for content knowledge is the exam, often conducted as multiple choice, or short-answer questions. These types of exams are less effective in the context of Philosophy as the subject matter normally requires more nuanced thinking that simple memorization. As such, the basic for of measuring content knowledge takes the form of essay-question exams. The most basic such essay questions will require student to engage with content knowledge in their responses. The lowest-level thinking appeared in some essay-questions which asked fact-based questions about a given argument. Here students were asked to confirm whether an argument did in fact say this or that.

Summarizing content was recognized as a useful mid-level process for encouraging content retention and ensuring content was understood in some context. This might be effected through developing the outline of an argument, or by summarizing a written passage, and would work well whether done individually or as a group. Essay questions that required students to reconstruct and argument in their own words were among those indicated.

Higher-level thinking in terms of content knowledge is required for those assignments that require students to employ existing arguments in a new context, in this case asking students to apply arguments learned in class to their own day-to-day lives. More than simply reconstructing an argument in their words, students here have to apply the argument in a setting
that is unfamiliar in terms of what was learned, but will demonstrate an understanding of the argument’s contextual application in its being applied to a context of personal familiarity.

Ultimately, the department’s discussion had two important and useful outcomes. Firstly, the department was impressed by the structure of the assignments presented in PHIL 3305 as a rich and nuanced trajectory of content-knowledge application. It was clear to the department that the assignments used in this class would, in fact, effectively measure student content knowledge. Secondly, the discussion of just how such content knowledge is measured caused the faculty to reflect on our own individual pedagogies and the ways we view and implement assignments intended to measure student learning. Ultimately, this discussion was fruitful, and the department agreed that this kind of discussion was the most useful, and likely the intended, outcome of such departmental assessment activity.

E. Suggestions and Recommendations for the CLASS FACT Project in the Future

Looking towards conversion, the department expects to next measure SLO #3 again after semesters are in place. With a new degree path to be implemented, we will have a new capstone course developed, which will be a major-only course. Isolating majors from the GE population will make measurement of the department’s effectiveness in delivering outcomes clearer. Further, following the above discussion of elements most important to content knowledge measurement, the department may develop a rubric to measure such assignments by that time.