**1.) What are the strengths of your department?**

Critical thinking skills. We have evidence that our students develop these over the course of several classes with us, and hopefully from even just one course. We focus on detailed analysis of texts, evaluation of arguments, and careful, thoughtful reading.

Students work with difficult texts that are hard to understand. We work our way through them and do a coached reading experience, focusing not on broad generalizations but really getting inside them. Students get better at it over the course of the semester.

Another strength is getting students to think about things they have not thought about before, for example at the personal level in their own lives, taking responsibility for their choices and ideas. It frees them in certain ways to move beyond what they’ve learned before.

Critical imagination. The ability to be able to imagine questions that you then try to answer. Asking hard questions doesn’t come naturally or easily, especially questions that lead to illumination of some kind.

We can encourage students to take any of the classes taught by department members because all of us are really committed to good teaching.

We contribute heavily to the Ethics Common Seminar which focuses on the teaching of values. Students think about difficult ideas but also connect them to their lives.

Our courses have strong representation of texts and ideas and thinkers that are important to the humanistic tradition and to the liberal arts tradition. Students are introduced to things that are part of a long historical conversation, and to a large breadth of historical texts which is essential to a liberal arts education.

We give students the chance to take time out and wonder at the mundane – think about things they take for granted every day. What is knowledge, how do we know things? We let students think on their own terms about things that are already present in their lives.

We ask students to think for themselves. Classes are discussion-based, very little lecture. Asking them to articulate and defend their own views, imagine alternative positions, participate in the historical discussions about meaning. Not just writing ideas down, taking them as truth. We may write three things on the board and ask, “Why would anybody ever assume these are true?” We presume very little, start questioning from the beginning.

2.) **What do you wish you could do better, or do more of?**

We would like to consistently have enough majors to give them a cohort, a sense of community. This can particularly be a problem for women majors. Our larger graduating classes have valued that, having each other as a cohort, but we don’t always have enough majors to provide that. It’s also an issue of timing: we don’t get many majors who start in their first year, so not many have the chance to get to know each other and be together for three or four years.

Since we changed from Core curriculum to the Common Cirriculum, we have more juniors and seniors in our Intro classes. Many of them tell us they wish they had found it earlier. This is a shift from the old system, where the lower/upper Humanities requirement made a lot of people start earlier. Now there are a lot of seniors taking Intro level courses, and frankly it is counterproductive for us.

We don’t have much access to freshman; they don’t get put into our Intro sections is the same numbers as they were under the Core Curriculum. Students feel that they have to take too many things up front – to start right into a major, to get the requirements done.

We would like to offer our students a broader idea about what philosophy is, perhaps including service learning for example. Or more courses that aren’t in the white European male tradition.

More interaction with students outside of classes – Philosophy club or something. On the other hand we also have really high student/faculty interaction compared to other departments. People in the department are around a lot, students can find us. Faculty pay attention to students.

Early exposure is the most crucial thing for us – Philosophy is an afterthought for most students. We are teaching more Ethics sections and have more access to students in their last two years, but we have hugely lost access to students in their first two years: enrollment in 100 level courses has dropped by more than 40%.

3.) **Leaving aside discipline specific knowledge, in what ways does your department/program best contribute to providing our students with a liberal education for their lives beyond college, as informed and engaged citizens, productive employees, ethical beings, etc.?**

Our departmental learning goals are really in line with those goals. Four of our goals are dispositional, for example, “Resisting quick and easy answers”; these are the kinds of dispositions that we want to instill in students that don’t affect just their academic life but their lives in general. Think of voting behavior: they should understand that “the sound bites I hear are not reflective of reality, things are more complex than they first appear.” Comfort with ambiguity is another of our learning goals, as is lifelong learning. These are departmental learning goals, touched on in multiple courses.

The kind of work that is demanded in philosophy helps students become better writers. Say what you mean, mean what you say, try to do so as gracefully as possible. Pay attention to grammar and structure in writing.

We help students get beyond the training wheels of Wikipedia culture, reading real books, showing the value in not just synthesizing everything into bullet points. Classes focus on teaching students how to read and how to think so they can walk into a library and feel competent to read grown up books. They will not be restricted to the comic book and textbook section of the library.

Our students can do anything – employers look at them and can tell that they have the skills they need to succeed. Good at thinking, writing, communicating, valuable skills to employers. Versatility.

We teach students to question presuppositions, what they think they know, what they believe in. We ask them why, and encourage them to have an open mind.

Students like having the chance to think about the issues in which we engage them.

4.) **Are there ways in which you would like to see your department/program contribute to liberal education that so far it has not been able to?**

We’d like to do more of this, particularly for first and second year students.

Two or three non-ethics upper division courses in a semester is about all we can offer. We used to have a lot more students in those courses. The change to the Common Curriculum has really hurt us in this regard. There was an unquestioned assumption going in that the Core was too large and had to be made smaller, which assumption now seems both arbitrary and fallacious.

Students coming in to CSB/SJU with their Common Curriculum Humanities requirement already completed is another problem.

We could do more to integrate with other disciplines. Would like to think more about collaboration, cross listed courses, etc. Perhaps more Gender and IC designated courses.

What we do in our classes is at the heart of liberal education.