General Assessment of the Review Process

The Department of Philosophy’s general assessment of its five-year review is that overall it was a positive experience and that much was gleaned from it that may prove useful for the department’s future success and growth. We are particularly grateful for the nuts-and-bolts recommendations of the Campus Review Team, several of which point to immediate improvements that the department can make, and indeed the department has already taken steps toward implementing some of them. As a point of constructive criticism about the process, more guidance in what was expected and how to acquire expected data for the self-study would have greatly improved the process. In general, the template seemed to assume that the units would simply know how to find information, and although this might be a safe assumption if past unit Chairs were available to provide guidance, such is not always the case (as for us). For example, a simple note explaining how to access the Delaware Study would have been greatly appreciated. Also, the External Reviewer wanted more quantitative data than the template requested, and thus the two weeks leading up to the on-campus review was a hectic frenzy trying to acquire additional data. Still, both the self-study and the on-campus review were illuminating and appreciated.

Responses to Recommendations

The External Reviewer, John Norton of the University of Pittsburgh, had a single recommendation, while the Campus Review Team had eight. The department agrees with all of the recommendations in principle (although whether some of the recommendations...
can be implemented in practice given restrictions outside of the department’s control is an open question). Since the External Reviewer’s recommendation corresponds with the first of the CRT’s recommendations, we treat those two together and then turn to the remaining seven CRT recommendations.

1. **The department should be allowed to hire additional faculty.** The External Reviewer recommends, “the department be authorized to expand its research faculty” (p. 5) and the CRT recommends “In the near term the addition of a new tenure track faculty member should be a priority” (p. 7). The self-study revealed that over the past ten years the Department of Philosophy has lost more faculty both in percentages and real numbers of individuals than any other unit on campus. While we are regularly informed that we just hired two new faculty (AY2015–16), it is quickly forgotten that the two new hires were to replace *three* faculty who we lost the previous year. In other words, the number of philosophy faculty members was diminished by one. Upon receiving the five-year review recommendations, the Chair spoke with the College Dean about this recommendation. The Chair simply was told that the philosophy department is not high on the list for new tenure track hires at the moment. Given recent budget challenges to the University and without support from the administration on this point, there are no clear, specific steps that the department itself can take to implement this recommendation, and so no timetable for implementation can be set at this time. In our ideal world, however, the department would like to see at least one, if not two, new hires before the next five-year review.

2. **The department should explore alliances with other departments to develop degree paths.** Philosophy is often seen as an abstract discipline with no apparent practical value, and thus students wanting a relatively guaranteed career path frequently eschew philosophy. Clearly, the philosophy department wants students to recognize the practical value of philosophy, which is most easily done by showing its usefulness and connection with other disciples. Toward the end of fostering such alliances, members of the philosophy department met with the Chairs of Political Science and Economics (02/23/2017) to discuss the creation of a PPE certificate, which is projected to have an internship component. The first draft of the proposal for this certificate has been written and the Chairs have all approved it. In March of 2017 we shall seek any additional approvals with the goal of having the certificate available for AY 2017–18. If there is sufficient interest and
data to bear out the success of the certificate, we will move toward creating an actual PPE program. It seems reasonable to think that we would need at least 3–5 years worth of data before considering a move to the degree level.

Additionally, the department has put forth a minor in Philosophy of Law that is currently with the Senate Faculty C&I committee. The hope is that this minor might be coupled with an anticipated minor in Paralegal Studies. The two minors together would makeup a Bachelor’s in Liberal Studies degree, which in effect would function like a pre-law degree at UMSL. The philosophy Chair and the Pre-Law advisor (Billy Dunaway) met (12/08/2016) with Keith Womer of the Business College and Deborah Baldini of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Education to discuss the nature of a Paralegal Studies minor. (The representative from Political Science (Richard Middleton) was not able to attend, but that department has interests in the Paralegal Studies minor too.) We all hope to see both minors on the books by AY2017–18. Again, it seems reasonable to think that we would need at least 3–5 years worth of data, once the minor is in place, before considering whether a Philosophy of Law major in addition to the minor might be viable.

We look forward to seeking additional alliances too. Certainly, an opportunity to discuss the connection of our philosophy of Mind track with the Department of Psychological Sciences would be highly gratifying and, we anticipate, mutually beneficial.

3. The department should develop Advanced Credit Programs in local high schools.
Enrollment in philosophy classes and increasing majors as a minimum requires that students know about philosophy, and yet for many students their first taste of philosophy comes only in college and sometimes late in their college career. Thus, the department understands the need to introduce high school students to philosophy. To this end, we have started a number of philosophy clubs at various high schools in the area. This semester we even have an Advanced Credit course at McCluer High School, with 22 students enrolled and 12 taking it for college credit.

Having said that, there is a challenge to implementing this recommendation that is outside of our control. In order for an Advanced Credit course to be taught for college credit, the high school teacher must have a Master’s degree or higher in the subject area. Unfortunately, at present we know of only two high school teachers in the area who have Master’s degrees in philosophy. Still, both of these high school teachers have or are offering Advanced Credit philosophy courses to their students. Also, it is suggested that these
programs be administered by the NTTs. The reviewers recognized that philosophy's NTTs are extremely stretched already and so we are loath to burden them further, at least not without some compensation. Thus, given the outside limitations of available, qualified high school teachers and the present financial situation, it is not clear at this time how to proceed further or even how to calculate a timetable for this recommendation.

4. **There should be a dedicated advertising campaign to help with recruiting majors.**

As with recommendation 3, we recognize that most students simply do not know much about philosophy and what potential value it has. Consequently, these students neither seek out philosophy courses nor consider the possibility of a philosophy major. Thus, advertising philosophy is something we too would encourage. The Chair spoke with the Dean about advertising. The Dean noted that with the current uncertainty of the University budget and a move toward greater centralization, it is not certain how individual advertising initiatives, for example, the creation of advertising videos, etc. will fair. Any relatively large-scale-philosophy add campaign, even if the department financed it, should probably wait. In the interim, we will advertise course offerings and the philosophy major via the monitor in the Dr. Marcus Allen Advising Center as well as create flyers, brochures and posters. Assessment measures will involve collecting past enrollment numbers in select courses to be targeted and then compare those numbers with the subsequent enrollment numbers of those add-targeted courses. A similar measure will be used for the number of majors.

5. **Regular meetings with the staff should be instituted.** Better communication with the staff about departmental needs and expectations can only help the department and improve the overall workplace. Toward this end, monthly meetings were immediately instituted of which we have had one and will have our second latter this week (03/02/2017). Given the challenges of new campus-wide initiatives involving scheduling and budgeting, even the initial monthly meeting proved useful. At the beginning of the next academic year (AY2017–18), we can re-assess whether six-week (or even more frequent bi-weekly) meetings with the staff would work best.

6. **Review investment in the professional development of philosophy's GTAs.** The GTAs allow the department to run more online sections of courses than we would
otherwise be able to do. Such online course both help keep the department’s instructional expenditures low and provide financial relief for our graduate students. Thus, ensuring that the GTAs are prepared for their online teaching responsibilities is essential to the department’s overall success. It should be noted that first year graduate students assist faculty in the classroom and as a rule are not expected to grade online courses; second year students are then given more responsibility by grading the online sections of courses, which have been created in the Online in Nine program. Ideally, the second-year graduate students will also have been GTAs their first year in the classroom section of the course for which they are grading, or at the very least the faculty who created the course will be the Instructor of Record for the online course.

In addition to this mentoring process, the department has always expected its GTAs who teach online winter intersession courses, to take advantage of the two and half hour workshop offered by the CTL for them. (Michael Porterfield of the CTL created the workshop specifically for philosophy graduate students teaching the online winter intersession courses.) Thus, it came as a surprise to both the Chair and Director of Graduate Studies to learn that students felt that this workshop was optional. The Chair and Director of Graduate Studies will see that all students who at least intend to teach intersession courses be trained (particularly given the intense nature of the intersession) and we shall strongly encourage all of our GTAs to attend at least one CTL workshop on online teaching before their second year. We have spoken with the staff in the CTL and made our interest known. We asked CTL staff to notify both the Chair and the Director of Graduate studies about workshops that may be of value to GTAs who either are teaching or plan to teach online courses. We shall return to this recommendation at the end of FS17, which is when the next philosophy GTA-specific workshop is planned. Within 3 years we would like to see 90%-100% attendance of our GTAs in at least one CTL workshop on online teaching.

7. Consider revising the times that graduate-level courses are offered. While it is not obvious whether such a recommendation will bring about long-term improvement to the department, it will please our present cadre of graduate students. In the past, the department has sporadically offered one graduate-level course after 5:00 PM. For FY17 we have increased that number to two after 5:00 courses and will work to ensure at least one such course is offered per semester thereafter. At the end of next semester, we will survey the graduate students concerning the success of the evening graduate seminars. One
concern that was raised noted that in order to maximize our limited number of faculty, the department cross-lists certain senior-level undergraduate courses with graduate seminars (with additional work required of the graduate students). The concern is that making the time of these hybrid courses later may result in a decrease in undergraduate enrollment for the evening courses. Assessment measures will involve collecting past enrollment numbers in the courses to be taught in the evening and then compare those numbers with the subsequent enrollment numbers, both for undergraduate and graduate enrollment.

8. Develop specific metrics to help guide decision-making, specifically with reference to alums’ perception of the program. Knowing what our students think that we are doing right and where they think that we can improve can only improve the department. On the recommendation of the CRT, we contacted the Chemistry Department, who put us in contact with Lol Barton, Chemistry’s alumni point person, and Jim O’Brien, who administers Chemistry’s exit survey. Building on their work, the philosophy department will create a survey to be sent to all graduating philosophy majors and to graduating philosophy Master’s students in which we ask about 1) their perception of the UMSL philosophy program, 2) their satisfaction with the advising experience and 3) their overall assessment of the degree. We would like to administer this survey at the end of this semester (WS17) and then regularly thereafter. The Chair has spoken with the Faculty Resources Center about using Qualtrics, and the FRC has agreed to help create an online version of the survey once the survey questions are completed. Additionally, following the suggestion of Lol Barton, the department will look for lists of graduates from, at least, the past two years and make every attempt to contact and track down these alums. (Lol was quite clear that this is a difficult and not always rewarding endeavor.) The hope is to solicit information from those alums about their current situation and to what extent they have benefited from their experience in philosophy. Chemistry folks also suggested that we look to this information with an eye toward a periodic newsletter, highlighting both current philosophy activities at UMSL and those accomplishments of our alums. The departmental goal is to track down 25%+ of our alums from the past two years and then keep up with 50%–75% of alums thereafter.

Again, the Department of Philosophy is grateful for the opportunity to do its five-year self-study and benefit from our Reviewers’ recommendations.