

**Five-Year Program Reviews
Responses to Reviewer Reports
Philosophy Department
October 10, 2011**

A. Five-Year Priorities

The first part of this recommendation (by both the external reviewer and the campus team) is to increase the number of tenure-track faculty to ten by hiring two more philosophers of mind and two more philosophers who work in ethical theory.

The Department agrees with this recommendation, because preserving our nationally ranked M.A. program requires more tenure-track faculty than we currently have. Our MA program is ranked among the top 9 terminal MA programs in the country, and our competitors have an average of 11.6 tenure-track faculty. We will soon lose our place in the ranking unless we can increase the number of our tenure-track faculty to at least ten. Another reason we agree is that we have recently made our M.A. requirements more rigorous by requiring that every student write a thesis. This obligates us to have research faculty in place to cover all the major areas of philosophy which graduate students might want to delve into with a thesis.

The Department, which at one time had 13 in-rank faculty members, currently has 8 in-rank faculty members. Two of our faculty members are on a two-year leave until Summer 2013. If the faculty members on leave do not come back to UMSL, the Department's first step will be to ask for their immediate replacement. If that is approved, the Department will then ask for two more tenure-track hires within the following two years.

The second part of this recommendation (by the external reviewer and the campus team) is to increase the number of majors beyond our current 30 to 40. Two recommendations for structural changes that might help us get there are to reduce our major to 30 hours by reducing the required history courses from four to two and to offer a 30-hour Philosophy major with a pre-law concentration.

While the Department agrees with the campus team that the external reviewer's recommended goal of 100 majors may be unrealistic given the numbers and characteristics of UMSL's student populations, the Department strongly agrees that we should increase the number of majors, including double majors. That would allow the philosophy major to be taken off the UM Low Performing List. Our top priority for the next two years is to increase the number of our majors to 60 or more.

The Department has submitted a proposal for changing our major so it is more accessible to UMSL undergraduates. As recommended, our proposal reduces the number of hours to 30 by reducing the required history courses from four to two; it also introduces a pre-law track as well as tracks in science studies, psychology and neuroscience, ethics and society, health sciences, and history.

The main assessment measure for these changes will be the future number of our majors.

We wish to stress that the Department of Philosophy contributes to the university beyond the majors it graduates. Besides our nationally ranked M.A. program already mentioned above, the Department

teaches a disproportionate number of students from other departments and programs. The Department also contributes to many interdisciplinary educational and research ventures such as Gender Studies, Neuroscience, History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, Evolutionary Studies, and the Center for Neurodynamics.

B. Tactical Suggestions

- a. **The external reviewer recommends *immediately hiring a visiting professor*, which the department is in the process of doing. The campus team recommends *the prompt replacement of one of the tenure track positions and another tenure track hire as soon as possible*.**

The Department agrees. We hope such hires will be approved as soon as the budget allows it.

- b. **Both the external reviewer and the campus team recommend that we *keep our website up to date and that we provide more data about the program*.**

The Department agrees and has begun the process of updating and adding data to the website.

- c. **The external reviewer recommends *requiring the GRE for graduate admissions and admitting graduate students only in fall semesters*.**

The campus team questions the GRE requirement on the grounds that taking the GRE is expensive for students and is a weak predictor of graduate success.

On requiring the GRE, the Department agrees with the campus team. On admitting graduate students only in fall semesters, the Department disagrees with the external reviewer. Admitting students all year round gives our program an added element of flexibility, which sometimes allows us to recruit excellent students who are ready to begin their MA in philosophy but might go elsewhere if they were asked to wait until the fall semester.

- d. **The external reviewer recommends *more systematic assessment of our courses, especially online courses*.**

The Department agrees. We have formed a new Curriculum and Instruction Committee that will evaluate our course offering and their content and recommend appropriate changes. In addition, we examine student evaluations of our courses; student teachers have a faculty coordinator who examines their syllabi to ensure their appropriateness; online courses are designed by a faculty member and when graduate student teach them, the graduate students follow the template designed by our faculty.

- e. **The external reviewer recommends that the department *more effectively prepare its graduate students to teach*.**

The Department agrees that graduate students should be prepared to teach. We tailor teaching assignments to the varying strengths of our graduate students. In addition, we assign faculty to mentor and supervise their teaching.

- f&g. **The external reviewer recommends *developing grading guidelines and a common core of a paper-grading rubric* to be used in all courses. The campus team replies that an equally compelling case**

can be made to allow less structure that, while ensuring basic material is covered, gives the instructors freedom that fit their own styles and strengths.

The Department agrees with the campus team. We plan to continue our long tradition of honoring and supporting faculty autonomy while ensuring that appropriate material is covered and high standards are maintained.

h. The external reviewer recommends a *very sparing use of adjuncts*.

The Department agrees. We use adjuncts only for courses that cannot be covered by either our regular faculty or our graduate students. If appropriate tenure-track hires were approved, we would no longer need to hire adjuncts.

i. Both the external reviewer and the campus team recommend *taking some non-structural steps to improve the number of majors* (in addition to the structural changes noted above) such as the following:

- **Encourage students to double-major in philosophy and other disciplines.**
- **Begin a tradition of monthly pizza lunches for majors and philosophy faculty.**
- **Start an undergraduate-only philosophy club that focuses on social events (not talks or readings).**
- **Develop links to local community colleges by organizing days for groups of community college philosophy students to come to UMSL with community college faculty members.**
- **Urge the graduate students to encourage the major in the classes they are teaching.**
- **Market the major with flyers and posters that have a consistent scheme of tag line, color, font, etc. This scheme should be use on all posters for philosophy events.**
- **Knock down as much as is structurally possible of the north and west walls of seminar room and the north and west walls of the adjoining TA office to create an open common area.**

The Department agrees that some non-structural changes to improve the number of majors are appropriate. We are implementing the following:

- We have created flyers and other promotional materials to advertise our major either as a stand-alone major or as a double major. We are distributing these materials to UMSL's students and student advising centers.
- We chose a Department logo and slogan ("Philosophy: We have the questions for all your answers") and are using it consistently in our promotional material.
- We are organizing social events specifically for our undergraduates, including a successful outreach effort called the Big Questions Series and more informal events such as pizza with philosophy faculty.
- We are planning to distribute descriptions of our upcoming courses to our current students at the end of every semester, to encourage current students to take more philosophy courses.
- We have started a policy of sending letters out to eligible students who get an A or A- in any of our courses, encouraging them to take more philosophy and consider majoring in philosophy.
- We urged all faculty and teaching graduate students to encourage the major in the classes they are teaching.

- We are exploring the possibility of knocking down walls in our department to create a more inviting environment for students.

The main assessment measure for these changes will be the future number of our majors.