

Report of the Campus Review Team (Philosophy Department)

John Gillingham, the chairman, authored this report, which Professors Bernard Feldman and Matthew Keefer, the two other team members, have vetted. He bears sole responsibility for its contents. Feldman's and Keefer's comments are summarized in two appendices. As instructed in the Five-year Program review memorandum, the present document rests on the Departmental Self-Study and the external evaluation of Professor Susan Wolf of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. As directed, it will be written with a view to guiding program improvement, academic planning, and resource allocation.

Charged first of all with "validating the Self-Study Report during its day of on-site meetings," the Campus Review Team would like to commend the departmental paper for comprehensiveness, accuracy, thorough documentation, and incisiveness. The Philosophy Department has an excellent understanding of its strengths and at least a good one of its weaknesses.

Professor Wolf's lengthy and trenchant analysis requires further commentary. Wolf arrived on site a detached observer. After lengthy discussion with every faculty member as well as many students, she left UMSL a fierce admirer of the Philosophy Department, convinced that it is doing an exceptional job under very difficult circumstances. She has high praise for the Department.

The Campus Review team agrees with Wolf, albeit with certain qualifications and differences in emphasis. In her view, Philosophy faces a "severe crisis," is outstanding in scholarship and teaching, and performs greater service to the community than usually recognized. She also concludes, alarmingly, that immediate action is required to prevent the collapse of the Department. This report will deal with each of the important issues she raises.

The *crisis* to which Professor Wolf refers is, first of all, general and does not pertain specifically to Philosophy; it is not caused chiefly by administrative disinterest or oversight. Every UMSL department suffers from a lack of resources. The task facing planners is to evaluate the special merit of claims made by any one of them upon available funds. Philosophy's case is indeed exceptionally strong.

The department once had fourteen FTE's. Today it has six: three Professors, one Associate, and two Assistants. It can continue to offer a major only by relying on four seriously underpaid and badly overworked non-tenure track instructors, two of whom are on soft money positions that must be renewed annually. The department's responsibilities have, however, grown substantially in the past few years. The number of students taught per faculty member is an appalling 146 to 1 and the number of majors has increased sharply, as have its service functions. The department added an MA program in 2000. The loss of a single position, hard or soft, would, at the very least, cause crippling reductions in curricula. In order to stave off collapse, the resignation of any Professor

must be offset by hiring two Assistants. Special incentives should also be offered indispensable faculty members not on the tenure track.

The present crisis facing Philosophy is *contra* Professor Wolf, not primarily one of morale. Faculty members are angry but not disgruntled, and each of them continues to perform at an extraordinary level of accomplishment. This dedication should be rewarded, not punished and be built upon rather than taken for granted.

Philosophy's exceptional effort cannot be attributed to monetary incentives. Professor Wolf noted with surprise that none of her many interlocutors complained of the total lack of travel or research support, but failed to notice that not even the poorly paid non-regulars griped about salary! Inadequate remuneration is a matter of public record and a fact of life on our campus. The most deep-seated concern of the UMSL Philosophy faculty, as revealed in conversation after conversation with the evaluators, was, however, professional---fear of not being able to do a good job. It reflects a deep sense of commitment all too rare at One University Boulevard.

This engagement figures in the second of Professor Wolf's three sound points: *outstanding departmental scholarship and teaching*. The *curriculum vitarum* included in the self-study indicate that each Professor has blue ribbon credentials, enjoys a national reputation and continues to be highly productive and, further, that the junior regulars are also an extraordinary scholarly threesome. Of the four over-qualified non-regulars, one is the author of a textbook and another of a primer on Asian philosophy. A third edits a well-known professional journal. Several faculty members have obtained more than one advanced degree, most of them do interdisciplinary research, and at least one is a novelist when not doing his "day job."

The philosophy faculty is by anyone's definition an exceptional group of individuals. Dr. Wolf---- the holder of an endowed chair at one of the country's dozen or so most distinguished universities--- ranked them as individually equal on average to any department in the country. My estimation is that pound for pound Philosophy is the best department on campus. It houses not a single dud. Every member of the faculty is intellectually active, market-competitive, and promising.

And none of them is a *prima donna*. Both the present and the previous chair (who deserves great credit for the present excellence of Philosophy) have made a strong effort to prevent the development of a "caste system" from taking hold in a department where, by force of circumstance, responsibilities must be split between regular and non-regular faculty. Philosophy defers to no "stars," makes no exceptions for privileged insiders, and shuns offering "boutique" courses of interest chiefly to the scholarly specialist. Both of those on tenure and non-tenure lines teach classes at all levels and of all sizes and offer inter- as well as intra-disciplinary courses. Mutual respect and cooperation characterizes relations between the two groups. It should be noted that one non-regular serves as undergraduate adviser and another heads the curriculum committee. Such time-consuming responsibilities obviously are undertaken above and beyond the normal call of duty. An unwillingness of non-tenure tract faculty to assume such uncompensated tasks

would result in the implosion of Philosophy, whose present survival defies purely economic logic.

What most impressed the members of the Campus Review Team (and, I think, Professor Wolf as well) --- and the greatest tribute that can be paid to the Department's sense of dedication--- was high student morale characteristic of undergraduates as well graduates, and non-majors as well as majors. The discipline of Philosophy has high bars to entrance, attracts formidable minds, maintains rigorous standards, is exacting, and can be intimidating those learning the subject.

The students we met were a remarkably happy lot. In language that was often moving, they unanimously praised the philosophy faculty for maintaining high standards, being open-minded, making themselves available for discussion, debate, and (when necessary) help, and, above all, treating them collegially. An *esprit de corps* existed among them seldom evident on our campus. These philosophy students--- whose socio-economic backgrounds represented an UMSL cross-section--- demonstrated a touching pride in being members of an intellectual community bound together by the love of their subject. They provided the reviewers with a healthy reminder of what a university is supposed to be about

The impressionistic though persuasive evidence left by their words--- along with the high rate of undergraduates continuing on to graduate school as well as of MAs transferring into prestigious doctoral programs--- leaves little doubt that the Philosophy Department is reaching its instructional goals. They are, as indicated in the self-study, to acquaint students with the western philosophical tradition, teach analytical reasoning, reveal the philosophical foundations and implications of ethics, and expose the logic underlying both theoretical and applied mathematics.

If bright students enter the Philosophy program at UMSL, very smart ones exit from it. They have been well-served. In fulfilling its traditional and still most crucial role, good teaching, the Philosophy Department is providing an important *service to the community*, which is the final issue that Professor Wolf touches upon.

Wolf also singles out the UMSL department as exceptional in meeting special needs of the university, region, and state as consistent with the mission of the campus. (As the wife of a professor at an institution similar to our own, the University of Maryland/Baltimore, the evaluator can speak with authority on such matters.) She notes in particular the development of courses cross-listed with biology, business, and criminal justice as well as a plan to develop a center for the study of medical ethics that would deal specifically with issues surrounding biotechnology. At the same time, she complains that such a serious effort to demonstrate the relevance of Philosophy--- one few similar departments have ever made----- has gone largely unrecognized.

Responsibility for this situation rests at least partly with the department, which, in its own self-interest, should attempt to discover a "common language" with the university

administration. UMSL philosophers must divert some of the energy to public relations that they normally devote to logic.

As a preliminary step towards developing the proposed center, the department should consider organizing a conference dealing, perhaps historically, with the ethics of artificial life-creation. The commitment of UMSL, and the region, to biotech research provides a promising growth field to which Philosophy can make an important future contribution.

The Campus Review Team underscores Professor Wolf's conclusion that planning for the medium-term is a luxury the Philosophy Department can ill-afford at present. Survival is the issue. Philosophy cannot bear the loss of a single position. Here it does not stand alone among departments. In another respect, however, it may well--- across the board excellence.

Should an increase in funding become available, Philosophy should be recognized and rewarded for having not only maintained standards during a period of austerity but raised them. The record of recent hiring, and the cohesiveness and pride of the Department, suggest that it can grow without diluting quality. An expanded list of good course offerings will probably increase both the number of majors and overall student credit hours taught. The department should nevertheless produce a strategic plan prioritizing future positions in the event that funding becomes available.

In the meantime, loss of faculty is a clear and present danger. UMSL must continue to provide research opportunities, especially for highly marketable junior faculty, as well as offer a greater measure of professional security to selfless non-regular faculty. Failure to do either one will result in demoralization, reduce productivity and subvert commitment to teaching. A precious and irreplaceable asset will then have been squandered.

Appendix A: Summary of Comments by Bernard Feldman

Noting that as a result of the committee's investigation the Dean of A&S committed to launching a search for an assistant professor in the coming academic year, Professor Feldman thinks further administrative steps necessary and recommends: 1. That the Dean and the future Provost agree both to fill any opening due to resignation over the next three years and search for a second assistant professor in 2005/6, finances permitting. 2. That additional student funding be provided

Feldman further suggests 1. That in cooperation with the development office the Department develop a center devoted to examining the ethics of genetics by expanding curricula and hiring a new faculty member and 2. That it also participate in the First Year Experience and the revision of the Honor College Curriculum as well as promote the American Democracy Project.

Appendix B: Summary of Comments by Matthew Kiefer

Professor Keefer argues that administrative guarantees should be given to hire four new assistant professors (two per year) to replace the two tenured positions recently lost (by retirement and resignation) and he further emphasizes that plans for the bio-ethics center should receive priority from Woods Hall. Keefer also objects on grounds of inappropriateness to the presence of a senior administrator, with a stake in promoting an ongoing project, at the concluding session of the evaluation.