

**Five-Year Review of the Department of Philosophy
Campus Review Team Report
October 24, 2016**

Campus Review Team Members:

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The following materials and processes were used to help inform the findings of this review: a Self-Study document generated by the Philosophy Department; a launch meeting that included the campus review team, the external reviewer (Dr. John Norton from the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh), Interim Provost Chris Spilling, Dean Ron Yasbin, Department of Philosophy Chair, Jon McGinnis, and Associate Provost Paulette Isaac-Savage; and multiple on-site interviews. The review team and the external reviewer conducted interviews with the following departmental constituencies in separate meetings: tenured and tenure-track faculty; non-tenure track faculty; undergraduate and graduate program directors; departmental staff members; a self-selected group of undergraduate Philosophy majors; a self-selected group of Philosophy graduate students from the M.A. program; and finally the department chair.

The committee appreciates the significant effort that was put into the Self-Study report and the responsiveness of the current Chair of the Philosophy Department, Dr. Jon McGinnis, to addressing all follow-up questions during the review process. The committee also appreciates the time that the various constituencies spent in talking with us about the Department of Philosophy.

Summary of Review Team Meetings

Tenured and Tenure Track Faculty

The review team met with tenured (Wiland, Piccinini) and tenure-track (Olin, Dunaway) faculty. (We note that it might have been useful to meet with tenured faculty separately from assistant professors, since these different groups might have differing perspectives on some aspects of the department.) Faculty members expressed the feeling that they are stretched very thin in terms of covering required courses and mentoring students, due to the sharp drop in the number of faculty in recent years. They did say that they felt a strong sense of collegiality within the department, despite an overall low morale due to the state of the university. The younger faculty members emphasized a need for funds for conference travel, though they mentioned that the existence of larger Philosophy departments at other universities in the area (Saint Louis University, Washington University) did help to provide additional contact with other researchers in their areas, and that this somewhat mitigated the sense of isolation one might feel in such a small department. It was mentioned that the younger faculty had good mentorship from their more senior colleagues in terms of grant writing, as well as good support for accommodation with course scheduling when needed, enabling to a good balance between teaching and research, to the extent this is possible in a department stretched so thin. Senior faculty observed that some research opportunities within CAS, such as the Research Grants program, are not geared toward

supporting research in the humanities. It was pointed out that the billboards advertising UMSL can no longer list Philosophy as a nationally-ranked program, and that this is in large part due to the loss of excellent faculty members in recent years. Apparently there had been discussion of a new degree program such as Law and Philosophy, which might increase enrollment. Other changes in requirements, such as the dropping of a language requirement in the BA program, making it a de facto BS degree, may also increase enrollment. It was mentioned that the Curriculum and Instruction committee had recently vetoed the idea of a full BS degree. The idea of encouraging students to double major, in order to increase Philosophy enrollment, was discussed, but it was noted that the high percentage of transfer students at UMSL makes this impractical, due to the high credit hour requirement for double majors.

The concern was raised that Philosophy had been sidelined in important decisions where they might have been able to provide significant input, such as the hiring of a new director for the Center for Ethics in Public Policy.

The CRT discussed the drop in MA degrees with the faculty, who mentioned that this was due in large part to an initial increase in enrollment due to the admission of low quality students as a result of administrative pressure to increase graduation numbers. Subsequently, pressure arose in a different direction, leading to the current plan to have fewer but better – and better-funded – students.

The topic of diversity within the department was discussed, and the faculty commented that diversity is an important focus of syllabi. The CRT raised the question of whether the department has been involved in conversations about the urban role of UMSL. The faculty mentioned that there is a new Race and Racism class spawned by recent events in Saint Louis, that Jon McGinnis is working to develop collaborations with and to recruit students from local high schools, and that Lauren Olin has contacts with various local high schools through the Teach for America program. The CRT raised the possibility of participation in the advanced credit program.

The conversations with the faculty members provided information consistent with the self-study report. The faculty members we spoke with were able to supplement some of the material in the self-study with more detailed information, such as the head count of TT faculty at UMSL as a whole over the past decade, as well as the faculty in CAS and in the Philosophy Department. The department sank from 9 TT faculty in 2006-2007 to a low of just 3 in 2014-15. This number has risen in the past academic year with the hiring of Lauren Olin and William Dunaway. Nonetheless, the Philosophy Department has suffered a 44% decline in TT faculty in the past decade, in comparison to a 21% decline in CAS and a 14% decline at UMSL as a whole.

Based on our conversations with the faculty and review of the self-study document, the CRT concludes that the department is struggling valiantly to maintain strong undergraduate and graduate degree programs, as well as a strong research profile, in the face of extremely daunting odds. The faculty remain research-active, collegial and unified in the face of extreme pressure to do more with less. The department appears to be making wise financial choices with extremely limited resources, such as the decision to focus on funding a smaller number of excellent Master's students. This is reflected in the enthusiasm of the students, both graduate and undergraduate, for the department as a whole and for their individual professors and mentors. Overall, the CRT found that the department is in desperately need of additional resources,

especially faculty, and would benefit from improved consistency in the messages and pressures it is receiving from the administration.

Non-Tenure Track (NTT) Faculty

The review team met with all four of the NTT faculty members in the department (listed by seniority, David Griesedieck, Andrew Black, Waldemar Rohloff, & Jill Delston). It is notable that there is a large range in years of experience (5-30+) in this group. The NTT faculty carry a large part of the teaching burden for the department with standard teaching loads of 4 courses per semester. This includes a mix of undergraduate courses and graduate courses for the MA program. Participation in teaching the MA courses was definitely seen as a positive aspect of their role in the department.

In addition to their standard teaching load, NTT faculty are each also listed as the instructor of record for several other undergraduate courses that are taught by students in the MA program. These MA students cannot be listed as instructor of record because they do not have the appropriate terminal degree and thus must be mentored by the NTT faculty. The NTT faculty have to deal with student-related issues that arise in the courses. Clearly this arrangement is the result of the reduction in the number of faculty that the department has experienced over the past ten years. The NTT faculty expressed fairly uniform consensus that this was not an optimal arrangement but was necessary to cover the needed courses. There was some discussion of this extra workload being better reflected in their annual evaluations and in the possibility of this extra work being at least partially shared by the tenure-track faculty members.

The NTT faculty noted that they were keenly aware of the loss of national ranking in the department, which had clearly been a source of pride. They placed the blame for this on the loss of faculty that the department has experienced. They reported that the morale within the department was good and that they enjoyed coming to work every day but that they did not always feel the support from upper administration. They also reported feeling pressure to increase enrollment. There was some positive support described for the idea of unionization and this lends credence to the idea that they do not feel that they have a voice in campus decision-making. There was also a mix of reactions to a question about how departmental decision-making was handled. In particular, there was some concern expressed about not being involved at all in interviewing process for recent new tenure-track hires.

Some members of the group noted with pride that they had been actively involved in the development of NTT promotion guidelines and they generally felt that there were appropriate procedures in place for promotion. One suggestion from the group was to implement more systematic teaching evaluations through a peer-review process. In addition, they were positive regarding the access to professional development resources through the department and college for travel to conferences and for new course development.

Undergraduate and Graduate Program Directors

The CRT met with Eric Wiland (graduate program director) and Waldemar Rohloff (undergraduate program director) together in a single meeting. We began with a discussion of the undergraduate program curriculum. Given the reduced number of faculty the CRT wondered about the ability to broadly cover the content areas within philosophy. It was noted that the areas of epistemology and metaphysics are a bit thin in course coverage but this was not a

significant concern due to relatively low student interest. Political philosophy is also lacking in the curriculum and this was more lamentable because the feeling was that there might be more student interest in this area. The directors noted that there is an “experimental spirit” in course offerings at both the undergraduate and graduate level. We interpret this to mean that new courses are offered on a fairly regular basis, which is a positive, but we do wonder if this produces difficulty for students to navigate through the degree requirements.

It is notable that there is symbiotic relationship between the undergraduate and graduate programs. This is manifest not only in terms of coursework, with some courses enrolling both graduate and undergraduate students, but also in terms of the undergraduate program serving as a pipeline for the graduate program. This level of interconnection is again driven at least partially by the relatively small number of faculty and the need for ever greater efficiency. The graduate program has seen a significant decline in numbers over the past few years. This has been driven by both a reduction in faculty and a desire to recruit and fund higher-quality students. It is notable that the MA students are all now funded with a stipend. The department had about 30 applicants this year to the MA program and admitted 23, with a net of 6 new students who actually came into the program. The department would like to see the number of applications grow, which would allow for more selectivity in admitting strong students. The program would like to receive more University support for recruiting at both the undergraduate and graduate level. They admit that they do not have expertise in marketing and would welcome additional support.

Staff

The Philosophy Department shares its two full-time staff members with the Department of Communication and Media as a result of the spring 2016 staff layoffs prompted by the campus budget crisis. The merger has left the two departments with very experienced staff—between them the Business Specialist II and the Office Support Assistant III have twenty-five years on campus—but there is no question that the spring dislocations were as traumatic in Philosophy as they were across the campus. In interviews with the committee, both staff members assured us that the process of workload adjustment was going comparatively smoothly and praised the state of morale in the department (a consistent theme throughout the day). About campus staff morale they were less sanguine, citing both the recent layoffs and the lack of raises, though they recognized that some things are outside the purview of the department(s).

There are some concerns about the new regime that are more local, however, and that will require ongoing attention from both the chair and the college. The first is that the BS II is now in a supervisory role, after many years as the solo staff member in the department; fostering a successful relationship in the office will require attentiveness all around—such things do not arise automatically. Secondly, the overall supervisory structure is considerably more complicated than before, with two chairs and the college’s fiscal officer now in a position to evaluate the staff—an arrangement in which the more formal oversight from the college is also operating at a greater distance from the day-to-day operations in which the chairs are involved. Staff were quick to say that communications with CAS are typically clear and robust—no complaints there—but also that, at this time, the new supervisory arrangement is a work in progress, with some built-in uncertainty in the evaluation process. Since those uncertainties arise from a structural situation, they need to be addressed structurally; the good will of all parties involved, though obviously present, will not by itself be sufficient.

Undergraduate Students

In reviewing the Self-Study Report, it became clear to the CRT that since the last review five years ago, the undergraduate student population has experienced stability in terms of new students admitted (between 14-18), continuing students, and graduating students. Since the last review, however, the total enrollment in undergraduate student credit hours in philosophy courses declined from a high of 8,268 in AY-2013 to a low of 6,135 in AY-2016. As the aforementioned illustrates, the department provided good quantitative data on undergraduate course enrollment that captured the reality of the decreasing enrollment experienced across the entire UMSL campus. In addressing this issue, the Philosophy Department's Self-Study Report suggests that the department's student enrollment goals are consistent with UMSL's overall goal of increasing the "...annual number of degrees conferred by 20% through an enriched UMSL experience..." To increase student interest and enrollment in philosophy courses, the department has been aggressive in creating certificate programs that highlight the usefulness of philosophy courses across majors and disciplines. Some of these certificate programs include Neuroscience, History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, and Evolutionary Studies. Moreover, to reach "career-minded UMSL students who have an eye toward practical applications of their work in philosophy," the department has created new undergraduate tracks such as pre-law, science studies, psychology and neuroscience, ethics and society, health science and history of philosophy.

Qualitative insights on students' undergraduate experiences were gained primarily from interviews with a self-selected group of undergraduate students. All of the undergraduate student majors were emailed about the Campus Review Team's visit and three students decided to attend the interview. To begin, the Campus Review Team and the External Reviewer were extremely impressed with these three students' insights, suggestions, understanding of, and dedication to the field of philosophy. The three undergraduate students interviewed—one White female, one Black male, and one White male—worked while attending school, and two of them are also parents. Each of these students was above the age of 23, consistent with UMSL's non-traditional student population, and demonstrated an acute understanding of the field of philosophy and its benefits in academic and everyday life. However, there were no demographic data provided in the Self-Study that illustrated the extent to which this group of students represented the gender and racial diversity of philosophy undergraduate majors.

The *Philosopher's Forum* was mentioned as a nice community whose effectiveness was facilitated by a strong graduate student community presence a few years ago (around 2013-2014). According to the students, some of the undergraduate program's strengths include (a) supportive professors, (b) great course offerings, (c) convenience of online courses, (d) UMSL's affordability. There were conversations about the possibility of double majoring as a way to increase enrollment in courses and the number of philosophy majors. Undergraduate students noted that it is possible that double majoring is not considered because of the need for students to understand how a major in philosophy is applicable to an array of fields. One student noted that the disinterest in majoring in philosophy emanates from the pressure on students to achieve a degree for "practical" purposes. In the students words "conjoining philosophy with practical professions will be essential in recruiting undergraduate students."

Graduate Students

The CRT met with seven graduate students, ranging from first-years to a recent MA graduate. They, like everyone else, indicate that morale is good and praise the department for fostering a supportive environment; congenial relations exist not just between faculty and students, but across the student cohorts as well (graduate students are typically admitted in groups of 5-7 and most finish within two years). There were no complaints about the comparatively low stipend, though at the same time no one suggested that the stipend was the factor that led to choosing UMSL's program; their reasons all had to do with the quality and reputation of the department. Presumably applicants who chose other programs would have something different to say about the stipend.

While overall the students we spoke to are pleased with their experience, they did offer some suggestions about the curriculum. More variety in offerings would be welcome—obviously this depends in part on the size of the faculty—as would topics courses offering the opportunity for more in-depth study in particular subfields. One student proposed that survey courses could be offered in rotation with topics courses—a survey of epistemology one spring, and a “topics in epistemology” course in the following spring, for example. The presence of undergraduate students in seminars was cited as sometimes problematic; the CRT recommends that more rigorous vetting of undergraduates for entry into dual-enrollment courses might be implemented. One student proposed that more thesis guidance earlier in the program would be helpful, in that it would demystify the process for first-year students. And there was near-universal disdain for the 2:00-4:40 seminar slot; classes either earlier or later in the day would be preferred. The Department might experiment with evening graduate seminars, which are common in English and History.

The CRT notes that while the graduate students seem satisfied with the degree of pedagogical training they receive before they begin their teaching, and the support supplied by the instructor of record in the courses to which they are assigned, we are not convinced that they are taking full advantage of campus resources in this regard. While several mentioned employing the services of the undergraduate philosophy tutors, there seems to be minimal use of the Writing Center, and several students conveyed the impression that the Department considers the start-of-semester GTA workshops run by the Center for Teaching and Learning as completely optional—potentially helpful, but not really necessary. One student opined that he did not want to have his own natural teaching style constrained by what he evidently saw as cookie-cutter rules from outside the discipline.

Philosophy Department Strengths

We note at the outset that there was strong agreement on the committee that the Philosophy Department is a terrific example of doing the maximum with existing resources. We note the following specific areas of strength:

- 1. The existing faculty are quite strong.** Clearly the productivity of the research faculty is quite good and the NTT faculty are productive and effective teachers. One encouraging sign is that the department has been able to recruit very good young faculty recently.
- 2. The Philosophy Department is extremely efficient with resources.** This is manifest in numerous ways including the ability to offer a large number of courses with relatively few

faculty. Examples of this efficiency include the double-dipping of courses for both undergraduate and graduate enrollment and the use of MA students teaching courses with full-time faculty listed as “instructor of record”. We note that this level of efficiency comes with notable potential downsides including the possibilities that the graduate courses are more watered down than they might be and that the level of instruction from the MA students, who are themselves quite green, may not be optimal.

3. The morale within the department is surprisingly strong. Despite the reduction in faculty numbers and the turmoil of staff turnover and reassignments the committee was uniformly impressed that the morale was quite good. The faculty seem to get along well and the mood within the department is surprisingly good despite the recent budget situation. It is notable that the sense of a lack of support from the administration was a common thread in our discussion with various groups. The graduate students appear to enjoy a strong camaraderie which was evidenced by strong academic and social connections between students in the MA program.

4. The students are very bright, articulate, and motivated. Admittedly, we met with self-selected groups of both undergraduate and graduate students with the obvious potential for bias that this entails. However, even if these groups were the best students, they were an impressive group and that speaks to the ability of the department to recruit very strong majors and graduate students. This bodes well for the future of the department. The students also seemed to feel that the faculty were not aloof and that they were very approachable and provided necessary support.

5. The Philosophy department is the home of the Bachelor of Liberal Studies (BLS) degree. This is reportedly the fastest growing degree program in the College.

Recommendations

1. We agree with the external reviewer, Dr. John Norton that an increase in faculty is urgently needed for this hard-working and productive department. We are also acutely aware of the financial challenges that the University faces. In the near term the addition of a new tenure-track faculty member should be a priority.

2. The department should continue to explore alliances with other departments to develop a degree path that might be attractive to presumptive majors. For example, there was discussion about a track in Philosophy of Mind, which is a hot current direction in the field. This could perhaps be done in connection with the Department of Psychological Sciences.

3. The department should develop advanced credit programs in the local high schools that would be administered through the NTT faculty. This could provide an additional source of revenue and a potential pool of students who would become majors.

4. A dedicated advertising campaign should be developed for the department to help with recruitment of majors. This should be done in consultation with the College and with the on campus professionals in the Office of Advancement Advertising.

5. The committee recommends instituting regular, perhaps monthly, staff meetings with the chair, at which questions, concerns, assessment of ongoing projects, future planning, and department processes can be reviewed. Similar meetings, including chairs from both Philosophy and Communication and Media and the College fiscal officer, should perhaps happen once a semester.
6. It would behoove the department to review its investment in the professional development of its GTAs, especially given the amount of online teaching they do.
7. The department should consider revising the times that graduate courses are offered to reflect the desires of the MA students (avoiding the 2:00-4:30pm slot). The committee realizes that this may not be feasible given other constraints.
8. In terms of long-range planning the committee recommends the development of specific metrics to help guide decision-making. The committee would urge the department to devise specific plans to collect data from students regarding their perceptions of the program, satisfaction with the advising experiences, and their satisfaction with the degree. In addition specific data on where students are going following graduation would be extremely helpful in future planning. The Chemistry department apparently is a model on campus for tracking alumni and they should be consulted regarding the process. We would suggest the possible use of the Qualtrics software that is freely available on campus as one tool that might be useful to conduct online student surveys. The software is powerful, flexible, very easy to use and the price would fit any budget.