

2003-2004 Executive Summary Five-Year Reviews of UM-St. Louis Departments

Department: Philosophy
College: Arts and Sciences

Department and Program Mission

The mission of the Department of Philosophy is to increase, preserve, and transmit philosophical knowledge and understanding by means of research, teaching, and service. Faculty research advances knowledge and informs practice in ethics, logic, history of ideas, sciences and medicine, arts, and law. We teach both traditional and nontraditional students at the undergraduate and graduate level and prepare them to take leadership roles in their communities or seek advanced degrees. We address the needs of students in all disciplines. The faculty, through outreach and service, contribute to the public discussion of significant value issues nationally and in the metropolitan region.

This mission supports the UM-St. Louis and the UM commitment to (1) develop a faculty nationally recognized for research and teaching, and (2) develop a "learner-centered research university" meeting the needs of traditional and nontraditional students. Despite the loss of in-rank faculty (from 14 to 6) and resources, the department has excelled in executing its mission.

Strengths and Distinguishing Characteristics of the Program

We offer B.A. and M.A. programs that are academically outstanding, remarkably efficient, and high in student satisfaction. With only 6 FTE faculty, we produce 3,400 SCHs, with a student-faculty ratio of 168 to 1. (For comparison, Political Science is 46:1.) Majors number 35, graduate students 25. For outreach, the department pioneered web-based courses (1998) and video instruction (1978), with content provided by our own faculty, and the number of offerings and students has increased steadily.

The B.A. program introduces students to the fundamental concerns of philosophy, trains them in reasoning and analytical writing, familiarizes them with philosophical issues in other disciplines, and prepares them to be reflective and ethical leaders in businesses and the professions. The M.A. program provides advanced instruction in central areas of inquiry and prepares students to enter competitive Ph.D. programs, work in fields (e.g. computer science) in which training in logic and philosophy is especially valuable, or teach basic courses at community colleges.

Talented, intelligent, well-educated faculty are the main resources required in a philosophy program. Increasing philosophy enrollments show that students value faculty expertise and helpfulness. Our 2003 survey shows that, despite large class sizes, 97% have had personal contact with an instructor; 99% say they could; and 97% are satisfied with the time allotted in class for discussion. Students also feel challenged, for 86% say the level of work is "about right" or "too demanding."

The M.A. program, initiated in 2000, is ranked third in the nation by the Leiter Report (the only recognized appraisal), and is the only ranked philosophy program in Missouri. The program is national in scope; its graduates are successful, and only lack of funding inhibits expansion.

Assessment

Majors must demonstrate five competencies: (1) know the history of philosophy in outline; (2) understand proof procedures in mathematical logic; (3) grasp philosophical issues in at least one other discipline (e.g. biology); (4) recognize the importance of non-western traditions; (5) conduct sustained research and writing on a philosophical topic. Competencies are acquired and demonstrated by succeeding in required and elective classes, but every major also must take the Senior Seminar and write a satisfactory final paper. A major must produce a fully annotated and documented paper that addresses an issue under debate in the contemporary philosophical community. M.A. students must complete 12 courses (36 hours) with grades of B or better and meet distribution requirements in four specialty areas. A thesis is optional, but to graduate all must pass a Comprehensive Examination in two of the four areas.

Productivity of Faculty

All in-rank faculty graduated from world-class universities (Chicago, Columbia U., Cornell, Harvard, Princeton, U. Penn) and have established national or international reputations for research. Their works are published in the most competitive journals and by the most prestigious publishers (e.g. Cambridge, Chicago, Cornell, Oxford). From 1998-2003, they published 9 books, 74 refereed articles or chapters, 25 reviews or encyclopedia entries; they edited 8 anthologies, and delivered 55 professional papers. One Professor won the Chancellor's Research Award; another received the National Library Association's "Best Book" award. One is the author of a book at the forefront of a national aesthetics movement; another wrote the nation's most widely used medical ethics textbook. The faculty received 37 research grants, including highly competitive external grants. A Summer Seminar and a Summer Institute Grant from National Endowment for the Humanities are the only institutional grants ever awarded to any university in Missouri. An NEH Research Fellowship was the only one awarded in the state that year.

Faculty serve as editors or members of editorial boards of 6 scholarly journals and review mss for 27 journals and presses. They serve on panels for grant agencies (e.g. NEH) and on 4 national regulatory or advisory boards overseeing medical research (e.g. National Cancer Institute, National Eye Institute) and contribute to public discussions of ethical issues, both locally and nationally. They are members of such important campus and university committees as Research Board, IFC, Tenure and Promotion, Curriculum, Campus Research, and Planning, as well as search committees for A&S Dean, Interim-Chancellor, Chancellor and Provost. The department holds itself to a high standard of research and service that is accepted and met by its members.

Curriculum Quality

The research achievements and professional status of the faculty testify to the quality of instruction. That the M.A. program is ranked among the top three in the nation by the Leiter Report (see above) is an independent, direct, and positive assessment of its quality, but it is also an indirect and positive assessment of the quality of the undergraduate program. Other data confirm the high quality of both programs: (1) B.A. graduates are accepted (often with support) into such outstanding programs as University of Chicago, as well as into respectable programs

like Washington U. and St. Louis U.;(2) our strongest M.A. graduates have been accepted into top-ten Ph.D. programs (e.g. Arizona, North Carolina-Chapel Hill); graduates staying in the area have obtained tenure-track jobs at local colleges or entered doctoral programs (Philosophy at Washington U., Health-Care Ethics at St. Louis University). Student success mirrors program success.

Program Accreditation: NA

Long-Range Goals and Strategies

Despite lower recent campus enrollments, the number of students and SCHs in our program have increased. We plan (1) to increase majors from 35 to 50 by recruiting students in their first two years; (2) if granted resources to assist graduate students and hire new faculty, we aim to double our M.A. program to 50; (3) to meet campus and regional needs, we will increase our commitment to applied ethics (in medicine, business, media, computers, and engineering) and philosophy of science and medicine. We plan to establish a Center for the Public Understanding of Science involving biotech industries and institutions in the regional; the Center will award a Certificate in Bioethics and be supported in part by grants.

Given few resources from the beginning, the Philosophy Department established a national reputation and attracted faculty of talent. The university and its students have benefited from this success, but retirements and resignations have lowered in-rank faculty from 14 to 5, and the possibility of more losses looms. Thus, despite all the accomplishments documented above, the department is teetering on the edge of dissolution, and the erosion shows.

Fewer faculty teach more students in larger classes, the variety of course offerings is sharply reduced, students must wait longer for needed classes, graduate students cannot be guaranteed graduate courses, and undergraduates are too often taught by part-time faculty. Within five years, we may be left with no more than 3-4 in-rank faculty, and a nationally-ranked research and teaching department may become a service department staffed predominately by part-time instructors. Long-range planning is a luxury, when the department's very existence is threatened by the need for more in-rank faculty.