

Final Assessment Report

Philosophy (BA, MA, PhD, Minor)

July 2017

Summary of the Program Review:

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the programs (BA, MA, PhD) delivered by the Department of Philosophy. Volume I of the self-study was submitted to the Associate Vice-President, Academic and Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies¹ and Postdoctoral Affairs in June 2016. The self-study presented the program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of these three programs, an undergraduate and graduate student survey, and the standard data package prepared by the Office of Institutional Analysis & Planning (IAP). The course outlines for all courses in the program were also appended. The CVs for each full-time faculty member in the program were included in self-study Volume II.

Two arm's-length external reviewers were selected from Volume III of the self-study by the Associate Vice-President, Academic and Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs: Dr. Moira Howes, Dean of Arts and Science, Trent University, and Dr. Colin Macleod, Department of Philosophy, University of Victoria. In addition, one internal university reviewer (Dr. Jonathan Witt, Biology) was also selected.

A site visit to the University took place on November 21 and 22, 2016. The visit included interviews with the Vice-President, Academic and Provost; Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs; Dean of the Faculty of Arts; Faculty Associate Dean of Graduate Studies; Chair of the Department; the Liaison Librarian for Philosophy; faculty members, staff, and meetings with a group of current undergraduates as well as graduate students.

This final assessment report is based on information extracted, in many cases verbatim, from the self-study, the external reviewers' report and the program response.

¹ The Associate Provost, Graduate Studies title changed to Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs as of June 2017.

Program characteristics:**BA**

The first offering of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy began in 1961, and in 1963 a Honours Bachelor of Arts degree was added. The Department offers an Honours, a Joint Honours, a Four-Year General, and a Three-Year General degree, along with a Minor. The Department is also home to the Cognitive Science program, which offers a Minor, and the Women's Studies program, which offers the same range of degrees as the Philosophy program. Both the Cognitive Science program and the Women's Studies program are currently reviewed separately from the Philosophy program.

MA and PhD

The Masters and PhD program both started at the same time in 1964. As the administrative home of Cognitive Science and the director of the Centre for Theoretical Neuroscience, it is also responsible for two graduate diplomas, one in Cognitive Science and one in Theoretical Neuroscience, which are currently reviewed separately from the Philosophy program. As of the Fall Term 2016, the Department began offering a PhD in Applied Philosophy.

Approved fields offered for graduate programs are (1) Ethics and Political Philosophy, (2) Language, Logic and Metaphysics, (3) Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science, and (4) Philosophy of Science and Mathematics.

Summary of strengths, challenges and opportunities based on self-study:**Undergraduate****Strengths**

- The program has a strong commitment to ensuring high quality instruction in all of its undergraduate courses
- There is a wide range of high quality courses of interest to non-majors, both service courses required in other programs and courses that are popular electives
- The Department has a commitment to equity, both within the philosophy profession and more generally in academia and in society. The Department struck an equity task force including faculty and grad students in 2014/15 to identify equity issues that could be addressed at the Department level and implemented its recommendations
- The Department is home to two related named chairs, an endowed Chair in Scientific and Technological Literacy and a University funded chair in Science and Society; As a

result, the Department is surely one of the strongest in the country in philosophical issues in science and society

- The program pioneered a pedagogically sound and cost-effective model for delivery of online courses; originally supported by a contract faculty position, once its value was established it was supported by a new permanent faculty position

Challenges

- There are relatively small number of majors, suggesting efforts are warranted to remove potential barriers for prospective students
- The Department is only able to offer a small number of 400-level courses each year, which is unfortunate for students wishing for greater choice (this was reflected in the student/alumni survey)
- The community among undergraduate students is not yet robust – work is needed to make that community visible and to increase a sense of cohort among undergraduate students
- Under the new resource allocation model (aka “activity based budgeting”), the Department’s health will be increasingly dependent on teaching activity, including service teaching

Opportunities

- The revised program structure gives the Department an opportunity to carve out an essential niche in the University – as provider of “Arts electives” that are plausibly viewed as an essential part of a well-rounded education for a student in various STEM disciplines (or indeed, for other disciplines in Arts)
- The revised program should enable the Department to increase the number of students doing combined majors and combining Philosophy with Arts and Business Co-op
- The move of Women’s Studies (WS) into the Philosophy Department creates opportunities to improve the student experience for students in both programs (e.g., joint activities between the two student societies, jointly sponsored visiting talks aimed at undergraduate students, etc.)
- There is opportunity for growth in both the Women’s Studies and Cognitive Science programs

- The Department is considering extending its online offerings so that an Honours degree will be available entirely online, rather than just the General degree

Graduate

Strengths

- The program provides a very high quality graduate education in Philosophy as witnessed by the awards the students win and the jobs they land, within and outside academia
- The program has productive scholars in a wide diversity of philosophical areas, thus providing students with many options for mentoring and supervision
- Philosophy is at the forefront of the effort to “Remake the Humanities PhD” by devoting more attention to the plurality of careers Philosophy students can successfully pursue, and is investing significant effort in preparing them for this
- The new Applied Philosophy PhD will be unique in Canada (and in certain respects, in the world)
- The external reviewers laud the pedagogical initiatives in the Department, suggesting that it will become “a disciplinary leader” thanks to its progressive curriculum, creative pedagogy, development of a successful model of peer review of teaching, and mentoring of graduate student instructors

Challenges

- There is relatively little course selection available for students in Philosophy’s graduate programs
- The current funding packages that are offered to students make it very hard to compete for the students. Some do not apply after they make a first inquiry about the level of support, but more serious students are often lost to other Departments with richer financial offers. Funding levels may also present a challenge for students who do enroll
- The Program has an increasing number of students requiring accommodation for health issues, especially mental health issues

- The Program's highest research profile faculty member recently retired. The Department will need to hire well when it replaces him, and continue to provide opportunities for other faculty members to develop their profiles as researchers, to maintain the Department's reputation for research

Opportunities

- The creation of the Applied Philosophy PhD provides the Department with an opportunity to establish a unique profile in Canadian Philosophy departments
- To create a culture in the Department where everyone is expected to carry their share of the load – in service, as teachers of both small and large classes, and as supervisors, and so to provide all department members with opportunities to establish significant research profiles.
- A serious commitment has been made to prepare graduate students, especially PhD students, for a range of jobs outside academia, since, as is typically in North American Humanities programs, only approximately 30% of PhD graduates will eventually land tenured appointments somewhere. The Department is a leader among Canadian Philosophy Departments in this regard

Summary of key findings from the external reviewers:

The undergraduate and graduate programs offer a well-designed curriculum of high academic quality that meets the university's strategic direction for outstanding academic programming. This excellence is achieved via an undergraduate curriculum that allows students to develop in-depth knowledge and methodologies in the major areas of philosophy and experience innovative courses and pedagogies that extend the reach of the discipline. Graduate courses, supervision, and research activities similarly support graduate students in the pursuit of scholarly excellence and professionalization.

Graduate students in this Department learn from leading edge researchers and are exposed to the latest findings, philosophical positions, and methods in the field. They also have sufficient opportunities to interact with well-established faculty from other universities over the course of their studies and thereby gain exposure to different ideas and approaches. Some of the research in the Department is also cross-disciplinary with the sciences which creates further opportunities for analyzing and contextualizing empirical data as well as learning about the problems of interest in other fields of study for which philosophy may provide illumination. Overall, the UW Department of Philosophy provides a rich educational context that well-serves its program goals and learning outcomes.

Research in the Department is internationally recognized and contributes new content and methodology to the discipline. It is clear that the innovative research of faculty is behind many of the creative, high quality program offerings and pedagogical approaches offered in the Department.

Program response to external reviewer recommendations

Recommendations

1. To maintain its strengths in Philosophy and Cognitive Science, the external reviewers recommended that the university proceed with a replacement position for Prof. Thagard upon his retirement.

Response

The Department agrees that such a replacement is vitally important. However, the Department also recognizes that there are constant financial pressures on both the University and the Faculty of Arts, and that decisions about faculty replacement cannot be made in isolation from broader strategic considerations. The Department will work together with others, in the Faculty of Arts and more broadly across the University, on various program initiatives (for instance, the possibility of creating an Arts and Science program or of expanding the current minor in Cognitive Science into an honours program) to ensure that the addition of a philosopher of mind to the Department is also an important contribution to those program initiatives. In this way, meeting the Department's need will also advance other strategic goals, such as attracting additional undergraduate students to the Faculty of Arts, as well.

2. The current graduate funding model is insufficient and the university should address this problem to ensure the continued health of the graduate programs.

Response

The Faculty of Arts and the Department are exploring all options internal to the Faculty and with central support to identify ways in which student funding can be made more competitive, with the longer term goal of improving student attraction and quality of life. The reviewers are quite correct that the health of the Department's graduate programs depends on sensible adjustments to the way graduate funding (and in particular the initial offers, since actual funding often exceeds what we are in a position to offer up front) are determined for our students.

3. The Department should investigate the possibility of finding tutorial space for one or more of its first year courses.

Response

The issue of first year tutorials is one on which opinion in the Department is split. Some see pedagogical advantages for first year students and professional development opportunities for graduate students who would run the tutorials. Others see a loss of contact time between students and research faculty and, since teaching assistants (TAs) in Arts work 140 hours per term and are available only in courses with quite high enrollment, an inability to offer appropriate feedback on scaffolded assignments in sections of courses large enough to have TAs.

The Department will therefore endeavor to take an evidence-based approach to making a decision about whether to change some or all of our first year courses to a tutorial model. During the 2017-18 academic year, the Undergraduate Committee will strike a subcommittee to: (a) investigate the feasibility of acquiring reasonably scheduled times for tutorials for courses that have never had them to date; (b) consult with stakeholders, including the current graduate students in the department; (c) investigate, perhaps in consultation with the Centre for Teaching Excellence, what research exists about the pedagogical value of tutorials in first year courses and compare it to the research available on the value of marking-time intensive scaffolded assessments of the sort typical in the courses as currently taught. The subcommittee will report to the Department as a whole so a decision can be taken about whether we want to move towards tutorials for our first year courses.

4. Given increased attention to the value of experiential learning, the Department should consider modest developments in experiential education at the upper-year undergraduate level. Relationships that emerge from the new PhD in Applied Philosophy may be useful in supporting experiential learning opportunities at the undergraduate level. The Department might also consider whether a new course in the area of applied philosophy might be added to the undergraduate curriculum: graduate students in the Applied Philosophy program will be well-positioned to teach (or perhaps team-teach) a course in this area.

Response

In the self-study report, the Department flagged one Undergraduate Degree Learning Expectation (UDLE) as not obviously being met by current programs: the University of Waterloo-specific UDLE that each student should have “experiential or applied opportunities.” The Department recognized explicitly that we could tell a story about meeting the UDLE already (we offer, for instance, many courses in Applied Ethics and Philosophy of X for various values of X), but suggested that we would prefer to satisfy

this requirement in a more substantial way. We therefore strongly welcome this recommendation.

During 2017-18, once the current Undergraduate Chair returns from sabbatical, the Undergraduate Committee will carry out appropriate investigations and do the “considering” requested by the reviewers. Among other things, the Committee will investigate whether the experiential education initiatives we take might situate Philosophy students who are not registered in Arts and Business Co-op so that they can readily qualify for an EDGE certificate.

5. UW and the Department should consider alternatives to the current arrangement whereby the Waterloo Philosophy Department supports St. Jerome’s Philosophy Department when its enrolments decline. This arrangement does not clearly support the health of either program. More mutually beneficial arrangements should be explored.

Response

It may be worthwhile to clarify the issue. As things currently stand, on-campus departments that have analogue departments in the AFIW (Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo) are expected to keep a particular balance in teaching activity between the departments, with the balance seemingly having been negotiated many years ago. One way in which this is problematic is that if enrollments are growing in one department because, for instance, popular new courses are introduced, new faculty are hired, or there is an increase in the number of online courses which one department offers and the other does not, the department where teaching is increasing is expected to “hand over” some of its popular courses to keep the prescribed balance between the amount of teaching in the departments. This seems to be a textbook example of how a system can create unhelpful incentives, and is especially problematic as Faculty budgets are increasingly closely tied to teaching activity.

Once again, this is not a recommendation that can be carried out by the Department acting alone, as they are tied up with inter-institutional agreements between the University of Waterloo and the AFIW. We will bring these issues to the attention of the senior administration of the University.

6. The Department should review the processes it has in place for ensuring that Teaching Assistants have a clear understanding of their work responsibilities and the character of the employment agreement they have. It appears that there are currently some misunderstandings between graduate students and the Department about the terms of employment (e.g., whether, or the sense in which, teaching assistants are party to a

contract) and about how problems concerning the interpretation and adherence to the terms of employment are to be resolved.

Response

It is not clear that any process will entirely rule out misunderstanding. We want to begin by noting that the Department has for some time been making significant efforts to address precisely this sort of concern: Philosophy was one of the first departments on campus to insist that all TA assignments be governed by an agreement signed by the instructor and the TA; we have long had a TA Handbook that talks in some detail about expectations for TA work in the Department; and during the annual graduate student orientation sessions we do our best to make clear that the doors of the Chair and the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies are always open to TAs with concerns. However, we of course acknowledge that improved processes are always a good idea

The Department has for some time been pursuing an initiative to develop a “Best Practices for Working with TAs” document. At our January 2017 department meeting a draft, based on consultations with sessional instructors and teaching assistants, was circulated, and it will be discussed by regular faculty at our February department meeting. As currently drafted, the document goes well beyond articulating formal terms of employment by clearly articulating departmental norms, and the current draft proposes a mechanism for TAs who might be nervous about complaining about an instructor they might one day need a letter of reference from to have their concerns heard without identifying them as the source of the concern. We hope to have a version of the document formally adopted by the end of 2017. (The Department is also aware that a systematic review of Policy 30, which governs the relationship between TAs and Instructors, is ongoing, and will update the document to ensure consistency with any changes to Policy 30 when the time comes.)

7. The Department should explore the possibility of helping the Undergraduate Philosophy Student Society create an annual student conference. There are many universities nearby so it should be possible to attract participation from students and faculty (as keynotes) from outside UW. The effort might help build the sense of community the Department seeks to cultivate and a modest one-day conference can be mounted relatively inexpensively.

Response

The Department has recently made it a priority to try to help its undergraduate student societies (the Philosophy Society and the Women’s Studies Society) thrive, while allowing them to maintain a significant degree of autonomy from the Department, since we view this as a way to improve the experience students have while studying here.

Among the ways we have done so is to encourage the current members of these societies to think about various initiatives they are interested in pursuing as a group, with an offer that the Department will resource the initiative as appropriate when we have the capacity to do so. In December 2016, shortly before we received the external reviewers' report, there was a meeting of the executives of the two societies, the faculty advisors to the societies, and the Chair. At this meeting several initiatives were discussed. Each society chose one that would be its primary focus for the rest of the current academic year, and several joint events were planned for the remainder of the current year.

The primary goal for this year for the Philosophy Society is the launch of an online undergraduate journal, with the support of the Library. The Department will (indeed has already) suggested an undergraduate philosophy conference as a possibility for the future. Should the executive of PhilSoc decide that an annual conference is something they are interested in launching, the Department will support them so that it can be a success.

Implementation Plan:

	Recommendations	Proposed Actions	Responsibility for Leading and Resourcing (if applicable) the Actions	Timeline for addressing Recommendations
1.	To maintain its strengths in Philosophy and Cognitive Science, we recommend that the university proceed with a replacement position for Prof. Thagard.	Investigate ways to ensure such a hire advances various priorities for Arts	Dean of Arts (resourcing) and Chair of Philosophy (program ideas)	Decision during 2017-18 academic year. <i>[Update March '18: the department will be advertising for a replacement in Fall 2018.]</i>
2.	The current graduate funding model is insufficient and the university should address this problem to ensure the continued health of the graduate programs.	Department will work with AP Graduate Studies and Arts Grad Studies office to compare Waterloo packages to competitors, find ways to more clearly articulate likely actual levels of support in offer letters	Department Chair; Dean of Arts and Associate Provost, Grad Studies	By Fall 2017, for implementation for grad admissions round in Winter Term 2018; this has been an item of discussion among Arts Chairs and the Dean of Arts during Fall Term 2017. <i>[Update March '18: the funding package we are able to offer for Fall 2018 has been improved for domestic Master's and PhD students]</i>
3.	The Department should investigate the possibility of finding tutorial space for one or more of its first year courses.	Subcommittee of the Undergraduate Committee will do this as part of a broader	Associate Chair, Undergraduate	Investigation during 2017-18, with a decision by Spring 2018; Draft report presented at Department

		investigate the advisability of first year tutorials, bringing the results to the Department for discussion and a decision		meeting in December 2017. <i>[Update Mar. '18: The subcommittee recommended against a formal implementation of tutorials for our courses, but the department encourages instructors interested in small group instruction in large courses to “explore informal options for tutorial group sessions that do not involve changes to the Undergraduate Calendar or use of the centralized scheduling system.”]</i>
4	Given increased attention to the value of experiential learning, the Department should consider modest developments in experiential education at the upper-year undergraduate level. Relationships that emerge from the new PhD in Applied Philosophy may be useful in supporting experiential learning opportunities at the undergraduate level. The Department might also consider whether a new course in the area of applied philosophy might be added to the undergraduate curriculum: graduate students in the Applied Philosophy program will be	Options will be investigated by the Department’s Undergraduate Committee	Associate Chair, Undergraduate	2017-18 <i>[Update March '18: A subcommittee of the UG committee has met with representatives of the EDGE program, and gathered feedback from a focus group with philosophy undergrads. An EDGE-relevant course is likely to be proposed to the Department in Fall</i>

	well-positioned to teach (or perhaps team-teach) a course in this area.			<i>Term for possible implementation in 2019.]</i>
5	UW and the Department should consider alternatives to the current arrangement whereby the Waterloo Philosophy Department supports St. Jerome's Philosophy Department when its enrolments decline. This arrangement does not clearly support the health of either program. More mutually beneficial arrangements should be explored.	The Department will draw these issues to the attention of senior administration	Department Chair	Completed, Winter Term 2017 <i>[That is: this is not a decision the Department can make, as it is a matter of inter-institutional agreement, but the Department has done what it can.]</i>
6	The Department should review the processes it has in place for ensuring that Teaching Assistants have a clear understanding of their work responsibilities and the character of the employment agreement they have. It appears that there are currently some misunderstandings between graduate students and the Department about the terms of employment (e.g., whether, or the sense in which, teaching assistants are party to a contract) and about how problems concerning the interpretation and adherence to the terms of employment are to be resolved.	Complete the process to arrive at "Best Practices for Working with TAs" document, including further consultation will all stakeholder groups	Department Chair	Draft to Department in Jan. 2017; discussions and consultations during Winter Term. As of December 2017, the Department is awaiting a response from the Philosophy Graduate Students Association to what we expect is a penultimate draft. <i>[Update March '18: we are still waiting for a response from the PGSA.]</i>

7	<p>The Department should explore of the possibility of helping the Undergraduate Philosophy Student Society create an annual student conference. There are many universities nearby so it should be possible to attract participation from students and faculty (as keynotes) from outside UW. The effort might help build the sense of community the Department seeks to cultivate and a modest one-day conference can be mounted relatively inexpensively</p>	<p>Continue to support worthwhile initiatives proposed by PhilSoc (and the Women’s Studies Society), while making them aware of this recommendation</p>	<p>Department Chair, student society liaison officers</p>	<p>This recommendation has been discussed with PhilSoc already; we will work together with them should a conference become one of their priorities and will draw the recommendation to the attention of future PhilSoc executives. [Update March ’18: A conference is not a priority for the current PhilSoc. The Department remains open to the possibility, but only if it is something the students decide is a priority.]</p>
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The Department Chair/Director, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty shall be responsible for monitoring the Implementation Plan.



Date of next program review: _____

2024

Date

Signatures of Approval:

Dave DeVidi

Chair/Director

April 10, 2018

Date

AFIW Administrative Dean/Head (For AFIW programs only)

[Signature]

Faculty Dean

Date

19/10/18

Date

Associate Vice-President, Academic
(For undergraduate and augmented programs)

Date

Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs
(Formerly the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies)
(For Graduate and augmented programs)

Date