

# Two-Year Progress Report

## Philosophy (BA, MA, PhD)

### October 2020

---

#### **Background**

The most recent review of the Philosophy programs took place during the academic year 2016-2017. Philosophy offers degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

At the undergraduate level, there is an Honours, Joint Honours, Four-Year General, and a Three-Year General degree, along with a Minor. Philosophy 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 programs.

At the graduate level, there is an MA degree in Philosophy, a PhD in Philosophy, and (as of Fall 2016), a PhD in Applied Philosophy. Philosophy is also responsible for two graduate diplomas: Cognitive Science and Theoretical Neuroscience, which are currently reviewed separately from the Philosophy programs. 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.

Overall, the review was positive. The reviewers praised faculty members' research as "internationally recognized" and contributing "new content and methodology to the discipline." They describe the undergraduate and graduate programs as offering "a well-designed curriculum of high academic quality that meets the university's strategic direction for outstanding academic programming" and note that "graduate students in this Department learn from leading edge researchers and are exposed to the latest findings, philosophical positions, and methods in the field."

A number of challenges and opportunities were mentioned, some relating to structural issues, like graduate student funding, and others relating to student experience and sense of community. The particular recommendations of the reviewers are addressed below.

#### **Progress on Implementation Plan**

#### **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.

**Status: Incomplete**

Details: As our response to the reviewers' report says, decisions about faculty replacement cannot be made in isolation from broader strategic considerations, and there are many financial pressures on the Faculty of Arts and the University of Waterloo. It is worth noting that the Department has just hired a very accomplished senior philosopher, Jenny Saul, into the position of Waterloo Chair in Social and Political Philosophy of Language. While this does not address the particular issue of Cognitive Science, it will add substantially to our overall faculty profile and is thus worth mentioning here. Philosophy will continue to investigate possibilities for hiring in areas related to cognitive science that would be financially feasible and facilitate broader goals.

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

**Status: Incomplete**

Details: Philosophy agrees with the assessment that increased funding for graduate students is urgently needed. In the Faculty of Arts, it is not the norm for supervisors to hold external funding to support graduate students (as it may be in the natural sciences), and with the rising cost of living in the KW region, many students find themselves unable to make ends meet with the standard funding package from Arts. 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 enhanced, including ways to rationally include the grant money received by some faculty members in our original offers to students in a reasonable way (which is complicated because of the low success rates, short duration, and unpredictable renewability of grants from most funding sources in the humanities).

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

**Status: Completed**

Details: To investigate this possibility, the Department formed a small working group comprised of several faculty members in the Fall of 2017. This working group investigated the possibility of tutorials by consulting with faculty members about the benefits and challenges associated with tutorials and gathered information on practices in other Arts departments at UW. The working group concluded that the substantive challenges associated with formalized scheduled tutorials

outweighed the benefits, and that the benefits could largely be gained through a more informal system. Ultimately, they concluded that "the faculty members who would like to incorporate more small group teaching activities into their large classes should be encouraged to (a) collaborate with interested colleagues in the department (e.g., form a teaching group) or (b) explore informal options for tutorial group sessions that do not involve changes to the Undergraduate Calendar or use of the centralized scheduling system."

Among the challenges are constraints on classroom space at the University of Waterloo, the pedagogical sophistication needed to run a discussion effectively, and the rule that TAs work no more than an average of ten hours per week. With respect to the last: students running tutorials must also attend class; if a TA runs two sections per week that is five hours per week, leaving insufficient time for the other tasks our TAs must complete, such as helping to grade essays and tests, helping students in office hours, and keeping up with the reading and course material. The potential benefits were seen as small group experience for students and additional teaching mentorship for TAs. These benefits, the working group proposed, could be gained by individual instructors setting up small group discussions and mentoring their TAs in facilitating these discussions.

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.

**Status: In Progress**

Details: Department members Dave DeVidi and Greg Andres consulted in 2017-2018 to generate ideas for this, and Dr. Andres met several times with members of the on-campus EDGE team. One initial idea was to draw on our contacts for the Applied Philosophy program to create opportunities for undergraduates. This was deemed to be unfeasible, due to the relatively small number of contacts relative to the number of undergraduates and also to the complexity of creating these arrangements. The Department will explore new ideas for experiential learning in the coming year. It is also worth noting that beginning in 2020 students will be able to combine co-op and Honours Philosophy; currently, students are only able to do co-op by combining Honours Philosophy with an Arts and Business major. This change will also give our students more opportunities for experiential learning.

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.

**Status: Complete**

Details: As noted in our response to the report, the issue here is the expected balance, negotiated many years ago, between teaching activity in UW departments with analogue departments in AFIW (Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo). One way this expected balance creates challenges is that if enrollments are growing in one department, steps have to be taken to increase enrollments in the other (e. g., the growing department may have to "hand over" some courses). This can create unfortunate incentives, especially as Faculty budgets are increasingly tied to teaching activity.

As noted in our response as well, this is not a recommendation that can be carried out by the Department acting alone, as these issues are tied up with inter-institutional agreements between the University of Waterloo and the AFIW. We have done what we can do to call attention to these issues and seek avenues for renegotiating these longstanding agreements.

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.

**Status: Completed**

Details: As noted in our response to the initial report, our Department has long had a number of structures in place to address the issue of TA expectations: Instructors and TAs work together at the start of term to fill out a detailed agreement specifying which tasks the TA will perform and showing how those tasks fit into the hours the TA is expected to work. We also have 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.

Sometimes advanced graduate students or recent PhDs teach as sessionals in our Department and, in this capacity, work with TAs. Over the year 2018-2019 we have put into practice a new initiative in which all such sessional instructors are assigned a "teaching mentor" from among the

permanent faculty. Among other things, the teaching mentor is encouraged to review the TA agreement and to help these instructors coordinate expectations with their TA.

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.

**Status: Completed**

Details: As a Department, we aim to help our undergraduate student societies (the Philosophy Society and the Women's Studies Society) thrive while also allowing them to maintain a significant degree of autonomy from the Department. To this end, each year the Department assigns a faculty advisor to the each society; the advisor helps foster the Societies' activities and create connections with faculty and graduate students, while encouraging the Societies' leadership teams and membership to make decisions about their direction and activities.

Over the past few years, and with the help of the faculty advisor, both societies have been doing generally well, with well-attended social events. Over the course of the academic year 2017-2018, the advisor and leadership team of the Philosophy Society explored the idea of an annual student conference or undergraduate philosophy journal, and decided in both cases that the work involved outweighed the benefit. As a result, the Department has been supporting other initiatives instead. For example, toward the aim of building community, Philosophy has initiated a new series of "social hours" -- these are events held once a month and before our colloquium talks, where everyone is welcome and refreshments are provided. At these events, undergraduates are encouraged to mingle with and meet not only one another, but also graduate students, faculty, and occasionally alums and visitors.

**Updated Implementation Plan:**

Note: since recommendations 1 and 2 are items the Department cannot implement on its own, and since recommendations 3, 5, 6, and 7 are listed here as "complete," the table below lists only recommendation 4, related to experiential learning.

	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Proposed Actions</b>	<b>Responsibility for Leading and Resourcing (if applicable) the Actions</b>	<b>Timeline for addressing Recommendations</b>
1.	Given increased attention to the value of experiential learning, the Department should consider modest developments in experiential education at the upper-year undergraduate level.	In September 2021, the Undergraduate Committee will meet to consider what options exist and how they might be implemented (due to COVID, the Committee expects to be busy with other matters this academic year).	Department Chair	Fall 2021

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: \_\_\_\_\_ 2023-2024  
Date

---

Signatures of Approval:

*Patricia Marino*

May 12, 2021

---

Chair/Director

Date

---

AFIW Administrative Dean/Head (For AFIW programs only)

Date

*Sheila Ager*

24/06/2021

---

Faculty Dean

Date

**Note:** AFIW programs fall under the Faculty of ARTS; however, the Dean does not have fiscal control nor authority over staffing and administration of the program.

*Dan DeVido*

September 29, 2020

---

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

Date

*Jeffrey M. Coe*

September 29, 2020

---

Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs  
(For graduate and augmented programs)

Date