

Final Assessment Report

Philosophy (BA, Minor, MA, PhD), Applied Philosophy (PhD)

January 2025

Executive Summary

External reviewers found that the Philosophy (BA, Minor, MA, PhD) and Applied Philosophy (PhD) programs delivered by the Department of Philosophy were in good standing.

“Waterloo’s Undergraduate and Graduate programs in Philosophy and Applied Philosophy are well designed, innovative, and academically rich. The applied and interdisciplinary focus of the programs is an excellent match for Waterloo’s traditional STEM focus and expertise in co-op education. Faculty have a strong commitment to excellent pedagogy and to building a supportive academic community. Relationships between faculty, staff, and students appear to be collegial and respectful.”

A total of five recommendations were provided by the reviewers, regarding undergraduate course review, adding tutorials to first year classes, creating a new MA program in Applied Philosophy, graduate recruitment, and international graduate student intake. In response, the program created a plan outlining the specific actions proposed to address each recommendation as well as a timeline for implementation. The next cyclical review for this program is scheduled for 2030-2031.

Enrollment over the past three years

	BA – 3YG	BA – 4YG	BA – Honour’s	BA – Honour’s Co-op	Minor
2024-2025 (CURRENT YR)	6	4	27	39	59
2023-2024 (LAST YR)	3	5	24	20	60
2022-2023 (THREE YRS)	5	5	15	20	55

	MA	PhD – Philosophy	PhD – Applied Philosophy
2024-2025 (CURRENT YR)	7	11	9
2023-2024 (LAST YR)	7	10	12
2022-2023 (THREE YRS)	8	10	10

*Based on Active Student extract from Quest on January 15, 2025.

Background

In accordance with the University of Waterloo’s Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response of the Philosophy (BA, Minor, MA, PhD) and Applied Philosophy (PhD) programs delivered by the Department of Philosophy. A self-study (Volume I, II, III) was submitted to the Associate Vice-President, Academic and Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs on March 12, 2024. The self-study (Volume I) presented the program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of the programs, including the data collected from a student survey, along with the standard data package prepared by the Office of Institutional Analysis & Planning (IAP). The CVs for each faculty member with a key role in the delivery of the program(s) were included in Volume II of the self-study.

From Volume III, two arm’s-length external reviewers were selected by the Associate Vice-President, Academic and Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs: Associate Professor Michael Milde, Department of Philosophy, Western University; and Associate Professor Nicole Wyatt, Department of Philosophy, University of Calgary.

Reviewers appraised the self-study documentation and conducted a site visit to the University on June 3-7, 2024. An internal reviewer from the University of Waterloo, Associate Professor Elena Neiterman, School of Public Health Sciences, was selected to accompany the external reviewers. The visit included interviews with the Associate Vice-President, Faculty, Planning and Policy (on behalf of the Vice-President, Academic & Provost); Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs; Dean of the Faculty of Arts; Faculty Associate Deans of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies; Chair of the Department, as well as faculty members, staff and current undergraduate and graduate students. The Review Team also had an opportunity to meet with representatives from the library, and Co-operative Education.

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a report on their findings, with recommendations. Subsequently, the program responded to each recommendation and outlined a plan for implementation of the recommendations. Finally, the Dean responded to the external reviewers’ recommendations, and endorsed the plans outlined by the program.

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

Program Characteristics

Undergraduate Programs

The Philosophy BA can be completed through three different degrees:

- Three-Year General Philosophy
- Four-Year General Philosophy
- Honours Philosophy

Briefly, in addition to University BA requirements, completing the Three-Year General Philosophy degree requires completing twelve courses including a core set of undergraduate requirements: PHIL 221 (Ethics), PHIL 240 (Introduction to Formal Logic), PHIL 251 (Metaphysics and Epistemology), and either PHIL 283/CLAS 261 (Great Works: Ancient and Medieval) or PHIL 284 (Great Works: Modern). The Four-Year General Degree and Honour's Philosophy Degrees require completing sixteen courses including the same core set, with Honour's Philosophy requiring a higher average. All programs have other requirements; the details are available at the calendar links above.

- Philosophy Minor

Until this year, the Minor in Philosophy required a minimum of eight academic courses in Philosophy, with a great degree of flexibility. We have recently made a small change requiring students to take at least one 300-level course to complete the minor; this change takes effect in the 2024-25 academic year.

Graduate Programs

- Master of Arts (MA) in Philosophy

The MA in Philosophy is designed to be completed in one calendar year for full-time students: Students in the MA program complete five seminar courses, two of which are the year-long proseminar (PHIL 680A and PHIL 680B), typically in the Fall and Winter terms. Then in the Spring term from May to August, they complete either an MA thesis or three papers. Our currently approved fields for graduate study are Logic, Language and Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science, Ethics and Political Philosophy, and Philosophy of Science and Mathematics, but we are in the process of updating these.

- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philosophy

The PhD in Philosophy is designed to be completed in four years for full-time students. Students in the PhD Program in Philosophy complete coursework, one Research Area (one-on-one intensive with a professor for eight months), then a prospectus; they then write and defend their dissertation. Our currently approved fields for graduate study are Logic, Language and Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science, Ethics and Political Philosophy, and Philosophy of Science and Mathematics, but we are in the process of updating these.

- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Applied Philosophy

The PhD in Applied Philosophy is designed to be completed in four years. Students in the PhD Program in Applied Philosophy complete coursework, one Applied Research Placement (ARP), then a prospectus; they then write and defend their dissertation project. ARPs involve four months of study one-on-one with a professor then three or four months of a Placement at a host site. In coursework and the dissertation project, students have opportunities to produce research that is non-traditional in form or target audience: e. g., they may write for a broad audience or produce a policy document or other form of writing. Our currently approved fields for graduate study are Logic, Language and Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science, Ethics and Political Philosophy, and Philosophy of Science and Mathematics, but we are in the process of updating these.

Summary of Strengths, Challenges and Weaknesses based on Self-Study

Strengths

- Faculty have successful research programs in a range of topics, including many that are interdisciplinary and engaged with both theoretical and applied topics in philosophy.
- The department has a commitment to high-quality instruction and a culture of taking pedagogy seriously. These are reflected in practices like our much-copied peer review of teaching process, our requirement that regular faculty teach 100-level courses, and our processes for mentoring for graduate student instructors.
- The department offers a wide range of high-quality undergraduate courses of interest to non-majors, both service courses required in other programs and courses that are popular electives.

- At the PhD level, students can choose between our program in Philosophy and our Program in Applied Philosophy, and students in both programs are encouraged to seek out employment opportunities in both academic and non-academic contexts.

Challenges

- With the upcoming addition of Dr. Lindo in July 2023, we will have 15.5 faculty, with 12.5 professors and 3 lecturers. At the graduate level, there are difficulties running successful MA and PhD programs with just 12.5 faculty whose teaching includes full involvement in graduate teaching and supervision.
- Funding for graduate students is too low. Its insufficiency was noted by reviewers in our 2016 review when the standard amounts were \$15,000 for MA students and \$22,000 for PhD students; since then it has increased to \$18,000 for MA students and \$26,000 for PhD students. As shown in section 3.4 above, rent alone is more than MA students take home after tuition and fees and is 79% of what PhD students take home after tuition and fees. Faculty grants from humanities sources such as SSHRC are not structured to provide multi-year, adequate support to graduate students. As the guaranteed funding package is provided by the Faculty of Arts, which is in a constrained budget situation, this problem has no obvious solution.
- At the graduate and undergraduate level, there is limited course selection available for students choosing seminars and 300-level courses. While graduate students do get to tailor some of their study to their interests in the one-one work they do with faculty members in Research Areas and Applied Research Placements, it would be ideal if we were able to offer more graduate seminars each year. For undergraduate courses, due to Faculty of Arts budget constraints, we are not able to offer a lot of courses with low enrolments, and enrolments in our upper division courses are not high enough in the courses we are offering for us to be able to offer a greater selection. Course selection is among the challenges flagged by students and alumni in our surveys.

Weaknesses

- We have a relatively small number of undergraduate majors, which is part of why we have lower enrolments in upper division undergraduate courses. It would be desirable to have more students choosing to major in Philosophy.

- We continue to seek ways to better publicize our graduate programs (including the Applied Philosophy PhD program) and to make sure students interested in our areas of research know about our programs.
- While individual faculty include readings and topics reflecting diversity and Indigenization, there is room for improvement, especially with respect to structural or systematic approaches to both.

Summary of Key Findings from the External Reviewers

“The philosophy faculty at Waterloo are unique in Canada, and indeed in North America, in their collective expertise in applied philosophy and their commitment to interdisciplinary research. The Philosophy Department is a leader in incorporating often underrepresented areas such as feminist philosophy and philosophy of mathematics into the curriculum. This unique expertise allows them to offer a distinctive curriculum at all levels.

Enrollments in philosophy classes are strong, and they attract students from across campus. The faculty’s commitment to applied philosophy and interdisciplinary inquiry allow them to offer courses that are meaningful and valuable to students from across Waterloo’s programs and Faculties.

The PhD in Applied Philosophy is to our knowledge the only one of its kind in Canada and offers a unique pathway for students. The presence of the program also benefits students in the traditional MA and PhD by showcasing the broad applicability of philosophical research and the viability of non-academic career paths. Over time we expect that the connections made by Applied PhD students during their placements will also strengthen and diversify the opportunities available to undergraduate students in the co-op program.”

Program Response to External Reviewers’ Recommendations

- 1. Undergraduate Course Review:** As a department, work toward clarifying the list of undergraduate courses - as far as is possible - so as to allow students in Major to more accurately anticipate which courses will be available during their degree program and plot a trajectory that includes meaningful choices.

Program Response

- We have reviewed the list of course in the undergraduate calendar and removed several we cannot offer consistently. We should note two constraints here: (1) 20% of the courses in the calendar are 'PHILJ' courses controlled by SJU Philosophy. (2) A further reduction of

courses requires a more thorough review of the 300-level offerings, which has not yet taken place.

- We have updated our 400-level requirements, both by reducing the total number of 400-level courses students must complete and by introducing a new required 400-level course, “Philosophy in Practice.” This will help ensure all Majors are able to access seats in 400-level seminars.
- We have developed a fixed scheduling template that publicly sets out the academic terms in which both required and popular, high enrolment courses will be offered. This template has been clearly communicated to undergraduate students on the Department website and through other advising channels.
- We have developed and implemented a 3-year faculty scheduling plan that builds on the scheduling template. This plan sets out the distribution among faculty members of required courses, high enrolment courses, and senior seminars. This will ensure both equity in the distribution of teaching tasks and more predictable course offerings for students.

In 2026-27, the Undergraduate Committee will take on the following tasks:

Revise the 300-level offerings to reduce the number of courses at that level and make their value and function clearer. This may involve reconsidering the program-level requirements for courses at the 300-level. Currently most 300-level courses draw low enrolments and offering fewer and more clearly designed courses will help address both enrolment shortfalls and student concerns about a lack of clarity in course offerings.

Dean’s Response

Arts’ curricular staff will provide support for these changes, and ensure their movement through the approval process, as necessary.

- 2. Tutorial Sections for First Year Classes:** The Department should revisit the possibility of adding tutorial sections to select first year classes. Tutorials could be staffed by senior PhD students who would gain valuable teaching experience. And the experience of smaller discussion groups could also provide impetus for students to consider taking the Philosophy Major as part of their degree.

Program Response

This was a recommendation of the previous cyclical review. In response, we appointed an ad hoc committee to prepare a report on the prospects of adding tutorial sections. The

committee's recommendation was to give instructors the option of adding tutorial sections in high enrolment courses, but to leave the decision up to the discretion of individual instructors. Since that recommendation was made, no instructor has chosen to implement tutorials.

In 2025-26, we once again consulted broadly with students and faculty on this topic, and once again found that there was insufficient interest in pursuing the addition of tutorial sections. We will continue to re-assess interest among faculty periodically.. If these consultations suggest sufficient interest, we will establish clear criteria and a process for implementing tutorials for instructors who wish to offer them.

We are hesitant to do anything beyond making these a voluntary option for faculty members teaching large course, for several reasons.

- Tutorial sections require significant TA resources and so reduce the TA resources available for grading. We have a relatively small graduate program, and we rely on graduate student graders to run our relatively large number of online courses. So there are real resource concerns about adding tutorial sections.
- Senior PhD students have mentored teaching opportunities through PHIL 215: Business Ethics. All sections of PHIL 215 are coordinated by Prof. Greg Andres, and in a typical year at least two of those sections are taught by graduate student sessional instructors. So while tutorials represent an opportunity for faculty-supervised independent teaching that could benefit senior graduate students, that benefit is currently available in other ways.
- We are opposed to re-structuring the undergraduate curriculum for the primary purpose of training graduate students. If we introduce tutorial sections, it should be because they make the most pedagogical sense for undergraduate students and benefit the undergraduate program overall. The benefit to graduate students is not a reason on its own to introduce them.
- The main purpose of tutorials is to facilitate small group discussion in classes too large for that to be effective in full class meetings. Most of our classes are small enough that this is unnecessary. The classes with the largest sections are typically PHIL 101: Challenging Ideas, PHIL 121: Moral Issues, PHIL 145: Critical Thinking, 215: Business Ethics, and PHIL 226: Biomedical Ethics.

Dean's Response

Arts supports the department's response. The department of Philosophy has a smaller graduate program, and so our aim is to optimize meaningful teaching opportunities for graduate students that are also contributions to the undergraduate teaching mission of the

department. I acknowledge the intention of the reviewers but also appreciate the department's thoughtful response.

3. **New MA in Applied Philosophy:** The Department might consider developing an MA in Applied Philosophy over the next several years. Such a program would build from the success of the Applied Philosophy PhD. There are challenges in finding sufficient practical placements, especially for students who are coming for one calendar year. Rather than having bespoke placements, MA students would have to be assigned to existing opportunities, and recruitment and admissions attached to these placements. Placements might be created by pairing MA students with more advanced Applied PhD students (perhaps serving in a "research assistant" capacity). Or it might be worth exploring the degree to which such a program could leverage Waterloo's institutional co-op partners. In any case, the Department should partner with co-op and Waterloo's advancement team to identify Philosophy graduates who might be in a position to offer placements to Philosophy students at various levels.

Program Response

The Department will explore the creation of a Co-op stream for the MA program. The Faculty of Arts already has several MA programs that include a Co-op option, including Economics, English, Political Science, and Sociology. A Co-op stream for MA students would open the potential for MA students to pursue 'work integrated learning' similar to the Applied Philosophy PhD and would avoid the most significant administrative and organizational challenges of creating MA applied placements in parallel with PhD applied placements.

Dean's Response

I am supportive of the department's response. A co-op option for Philosophy MA students could increase the department's applicant pool, deepen the number of TAs available, and create a strong pathway to employment for MA students post-graduation. The option lends itself to an "applied" stream, and aligns with the goal of GSPA to increase the number of work integrated learning opportunities to graduate students at the University of Waterloo.

4. **Graduate Recruitment:** Graduate program recruitment efforts, especially for the MA, should focus on attracting students whose research interests match with faculty who do not currently have a full load of graduate students. We heard from some faculty that they were over capacity, and from others that they felt they had inadequate opportunity to supervise.

Program Response

The Department will work with the Faculty of Arts recruitment staff to expand our recruitment. In particular, we will focus additional recruitment efforts on graduate students with an interest in the Philosophy of Science, an area where we have considerable research expertise and additional supervisory capacity. As part of those efforts, we will explore potential science- focused Applied Philosophy placement partners.

Members of the Department actively recruit our own undergraduate students to our MA program, and have success each year in attracting several of them.

Faculty members have been encouraged to make use of the research opportunities tool, and several have done so already. We will continue to encourage faculty members to make use of this tool.

We will also update our officially approved Graduate Research Fields to more accurately capture the research and supervisory strengths of our existing faculty complement. As part of that process, we will update the relevant parts of the Departmental website to more clearly communicate our strengths to potential students.

There are, however, limits to our ability to grow the program in this way. We are already working with the Faculty of Arts on recruitment, and our ability to attract more graduate students, including those with an interest in Philosophy of Science, depends in part on how competitive our funding package is relative to other programs with a strength on the Philosophy of Science.

Dean's Response

The Dean agrees with the program's response. A thoughtful matching of potential students with faculty members at the time of admissions occurs normally in this department, but more attention to where growth is possible due to faculty capacity is important to keep top of mind. The funding package offered to MA students (normally \$18,000 per year) is competitive when compared to our institutional peers, but I recognize that potential students would prefer an enriched offer. Despite this, I am confident that our programs match or exceed the funding offers from other humanities programs with which we compete. Adding a co-op option to the MA program would add additional funding for students since, on average, an Arts co-op student earns about \$13,000 per work term, and most MA co-op programs offer students up to eight months of work terms (two terms).

5. Increase Intake of International Graduate

Students: The Department, in conjunction with the Faculty of Arts, should consider expanding the intake of International graduate students. The obstacles are clearly financial. The benefits are 1) an expanded and enhanced applicant pool and 2) a reputational benefit that resonates beyond provincial and national boundaries.

Program Response

We agree with this recommendation, but this is entirely outside of the Department's control and is governed by the Faculty of Arts and the University as a whole. We will continue to advocate for this change, recognizing that the University's precarious financial situation means that an interest in expanding our applicant pool and improving our reputation is not likely to be a sufficient benefit on its own. We will also continue to aim to admit the permitted one international MA student each year.

Dean's Response

Since this review, the number of international students who will be allowed student visas has been reduced by the Government of Canada, and we have yet to receive our allocation of Provincial Attestation Letters (PALS) from the provincial government. The Faculty of Arts recognizes the importance of international students in our graduate programs, particularly their ability to share and expand perspectives and experiences in the classroom. As we wait to learn how many international students we are able to admit over the next year or two, we will keep the reviewers' recommendation in mind, along with our usual financial constraints in this regard.

Recommendations Not Selected for Implementation

Recommendation 3 (create an Applied Philosophy MA program) is not a viable option given the current structure of the Applied Philosophy PhD program, which is working very well. We do not see a way to effectively integrate an Applied Philosophy placement into a one-year MA program. Applied Philosophy PhD placements often take two to three terms to organize, and they last for two full terms. Even if the length of the placement were reduced to one term, securing placements for students in a one-year program would be an ongoing challenge, and would leave students little time to complete an MA thesis; this would likely affect time to completion. Placement opportunities are relatively limited, and take considerable work to organize; it's our judgment that these limited opportunities are more valuable to students in the PhD program than they would be at the MA level.

We will, however, explore creating an MA Co-op stream, which aligns with the spirit of the recommendation.

Recommendation 5 (increase intake of international graduate students) is entirely outside of the Department's control. We can and will continue to advocate for increased graduate student admission, but beyond such largely informal advocacy there is no way for the Department to adopt this recommendation without significant policy and funding changes at the Faculty and University levels.

Implementation Plan

	Recommendations	Proposed Actions	Responsibility for Leading and Resourcing (if applicable) the Actions	Timeline for addressing Recommendations
1.	Undergraduate Course Review	1. Review the list of undergraduate courses and delete those we cannot commit to offering regularly. 2. Update 400-level requirements 3. Revise 300-level offerings. 4. Develop a fixed scheduling template. 5. Develop a 3-year faculty scheduling plan.	1. Undergraduate Committee (led by UG Chair) 2. Undergraduate Committee (led by UG Chair) 3. Scheduling Committee (led by Chair) 4. Scheduling Committee (led by Chair) 5. Scheduling Committee (led by Chair)	1. Complete 2. Complete 3. 2026-27 academic year 4. Complete 5. Complete
2.	Tutorial Sections for First Year Classes	1. Consult with faculty and students about interest in adding tutorial sections. 2. Depending on the results of that consultation, develop clear criteria and processes for adding tutorials sections.	1. Undergraduate Committee (led by UG Chair) 2. Undergraduate Chair and Chair	1. Complete 2. N/A
3.	New MA in Applied Philosophy	1. Consult with faculty and students about potential interest in an MA Co-op stream. 2. Depending on the results of that consultation, work with Faculty of Arts and the Office of Co-operative and Experiential Education to develop and implement an MCCo-Op stream.	1. Graduate Committee (led by Grad Chair) 2. Grad Chair and Chair	1. Fall 2026 2. Winter 2027
4.	Graduate Recruitment	1. Work with the Faculty of Arts recruitment staff to expand recruitment efforts to include Philosophy of Science 3. Update Graduate Research Fields and Department website.	1. Grad Chair 3. Grad Chair	1. Complete 3. Complete
5.	Increase Intake of International Graduate Students	4. N/A	4. N/A	4. N/A

The Department Chair/Director, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty shall be responsible for the Implementation Plan.

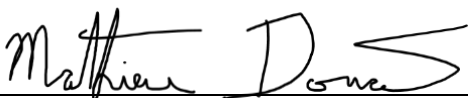
Date of next program review

2030-2031

Date

Signatures of Approval

Please keep this document in Word version. We do require you to sign it or demonstrate your approval. If you have issues with signing a Word document, please confirm your approval by adding the following wording when you send back the document by email "I hereby approve the attached document." We will collect formal signatures at a later stage on a pdf version.


Chair/Director

May 13, 2025

Date

AFIW Administrative Dean/Head (*For AFIW programs only*)

Date



June 20, 2025

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.



Apr. 4, 2025

Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs
(For graduate and augmented programs)
On Behalf of the Associate Vice-President, Academic

Date