UCC Program Review Committee summary of review

Program – Department of Philosophy

This program includes the following degrees, minors, and certificates:

- B.A. Philosophy
- B.A. Philosophy - Prelaw
- B.A. Philosophy - Pretheology
- B.A. Philosophy – Honors Tutorial College
- Philosophy Minor
- M.A. Philosophy

Recommendation

This program is found to be viable, see report for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

Date of last review – AY 2007
Date of this review – AY 2017

This review has been sent to school director and the dean. The dean’s comments are attached. The chair had some corrections which have been included in the report.

The review and the responses have been sent to Graduate Council, they had no comment.
University Curriculum Committee
Academic Program Review
Department of Philosophy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Philosophy undergraduate and graduate degree programs are viable. However, the department does face the challenge of declining enrollment of undergraduate majors and weighted student credit hours taught over the six-year period review. There also has been a change in the composition of the faculty over the review period, going from all Group I faculty to a mix that now includes two Group II. According to the students we spoke with, satisfaction was high, especially among master’s students, most of whom chose Ohio University over other top nationally ranked philosophy M.A. programs.

Commendations

- Strong faculty of productive researchers and highly praised teachers.
- Good integration of Group I and Group II faculty.
- Use of dual listing to create variety of courses for graduate students and challenging, but rewarding courses for undergraduates.

Concerns:

- Declining major headcount and weighted student credit hours
- Diversity in faculty and students
- Transparent governance and lack of strategic planning
- Assessment of student learning

Recommendations:

- The department should attempt to balance its gender diversity and ethnic diversity with any new hires, actively recruit more diverse students, and creatively use its speaker series and spring semester forum to bring more diverse voices to the program.
- Engage faculty in strategic planning to explore recruitment strategies for undergraduate major and minor programs, implications of RCM, and ways to serve other departments/colleges on campus with targeted courses.
- Focus assessment of student learning on new direct measures, closing the loop on the findings to make adjustments to curriculum. Make sure that each course syllabus contains learning outcomes and assignments to assess those goals.

1 Prepared in Fall 2016 by three internal reviewers recruited by the UCC Academic Program Review Committee—Assoc. Professor Mary T. Rogus (E.W. Scripps School of Journalism), Assoc. Professor Dr. Michelle Ferrier (E.W. Scripps School of Journalism and Assoc. Professor Dr. Vicky Parker (Health Services Administration, OU Chillicothe)—along with outside reviewer Distinguished University Professor Dr. Jerrold Levinson (Philosophy, University of Maryland—See Appendix A for CV). Submitted 11/15/16.
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Department of Philosophy has a stated mission to provide opportunities for students to engage in the philosophical questions that have engaged thinkers throughout time by providing a variety of courses to meet the needs of diverse academic departments and support the General Education program at Ohio University. It offers a general B.A. in Philosophy, as well as Pre-law and Pre-theology majors, a minor in philosophy, and an M.A. in Philosophy.

Given the relatively small size of the faculty—7 Group I professors and 2 Group II professors—the department offers an impressively broad schedule of courses, on both the undergraduate and graduate levels. It has chosen to focus on Analytic Philosophy as the prevailing mode of philosophy offered, with its emphasis on logic, argument, clarity and rigor.

While serving a small number of majors (29 as of Fall 2015) the department provides introductory courses in philosophy and ethics that meet Tier I and Tier II general education requirements for students university-wide, serving more than a thousand students in Fall 2016 (PHIL 1010, 1200 and 1300). However, the number of majors has declined from more than 60 in 2009 to just under 30 in 2016, and weighted student credit hours is down more than 25% over the six years. The self-study and an interview with the department chair indicated no clear reason for the decline. Student diversity among majors is just over 25%, including international students, and about a third were women as of Fall 2015.

The Department faculty collectively represent a level of research and scholarship activity more than adequate to maintaining the program described; all have been trained at reputable, and in some cases leading, doctoral programs in philosophy, and all Group I faculty have significant, and in some cases, very substantial publishing records in their fields of expertise. In addition, Group II faculty also contribute to the scholarly productivity of the department, although it is not part of stated expectations on them.

In the area of service, faculty members regularly serve on university committees and contribute to the university community with two lecture series and a philosophy forum that bring top philosophy researchers to campus. Until this year a faculty member also directed the Institute on Applied Ethics (which moved in 2016 to the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism). In addition, faculty members serve the broader academic community with lectures and paper presentations across the globe.

Faculty/Staff:
The philosophy department in the 2016-17 academic year has 10 full-time faculty members and 1 staff person. The faculty is made up of seven Group I (2 full, 4 associate, 2 assistant) and 2 Group II members. The Group II positions are new to the faculty over the six-year review period. Both were converted from Group IV and expressed satisfaction with their status since the university made changes to the Group II faculty position and with their integration into the faculty.

The department chair expressed a struggle with attempts to diversify the faculty, which currently has 1 woman and 2 international faculty members. The self-study details extensive but unsuccessful efforts to recruit and hire a more diverse staff, however the stability of the current
faculty has made this difficult, as no retirements are foreseen in near future.

**Table 1-1: Faculty composition, Fall 2016**

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Group I faculty members have a 2/2 teaching load and an expectation of 40/40/20 teaching/research/service. Group II faculty members have a 3/3 teaching load and an expectation of 80/0/20 teaching/research/service. It was noted that the two Group II faculty also conducted research and were supported with travel funds to present at conferences at similar levels with Group I faculty members. The department has a clear Promotion and Tenure document, and the most recent Group I faculty member to be tenured and promoted indicated he was mentored through the process to success.

Concerning the faculty’s scholarly attainments, one may note the following. Beginning with faculty who have left OU but who were active members of the Department during the period of review, Professor Le Bar was the author of a substantial monograph entitled *The Value of Living Well* (Oxford UP, 2013), and Professor Parker, was awarded two substantial grants by the NSF, for 2009-2010 and 2011-2013. Among current faculty, almost all Group I professors have published widely in their fields, with Professors Bender, Bernstein, Ehrlich, and Briscoe being exemplary in that regard among the tenured professors, and Assistant Professors Ishida and Hanisch also impressive given their early stage of their academic career.


**Facilities:**

The self-study indicates that faculty office space is adequate in Ellis Hall. However, the self-study and the department chair expressed concern about lecture spaces. Ellis 024, in which most medium-sized sections of the service courses PHIL1010 and 1300 are taught, is described as dysfunctional because its seating and dimensions do not allow for interactive classroom experiences. Large classes are taught in Morton Hall auditoriums that also are not designed for a dynamic, engaged student experience. The chair expressed the hope that in major renovations scheduled for these facilities more active learning spaces will be created.

No concerns were expressed by faculty members or graduate students about research material
UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM:

Is the Department fulfilling its service role, adequately preparing non-majors for future coursework and/or satisfying the needs for general education?

The Philosophy Department accomplishes its service to the university and is meeting the needs for general education. Philosophy offers a Tier I Quantitative Thinking course that develops critical thinking. PHIL 1200 (Principles of Reasoning) meets the college’s general education curriculum, and is required for all Scripps School of Journalism majors and was required of College of Business majors until 2015 when the college made major curriculum revisions.

The Tier II classes, including the popular Introduction to Philosophy (PHIL1010) and Introduction to Ethics (PHIL1300), and eight other 2000 and 3000 level classes satisfy general education Humanities requirements. Philosophy faculty members also contribute to two new “themes” courses, CAS 2401 (Becoming Human) and CAS 2405 (Knowing What We Known). The department developed an online version of Introduction to Ethics (PHIL 1300) targeted at the online nursing program that has a large enrollment of more than 200 students. The department hopes to develop more similarly targeted philosophy courses to serve the wider university community and increase weighted student credit hours.

Is the program attracting majors likely to succeed in the program? Is the number of majors appropriate for the program? Is the program attracting a diverse group of students?

The Philosophy department offers three major programs including the general B.A. in Philosophy as well as Pre-law and Pre-theology majors. These degree programs will provide students with a liberal arts education as well as prepare them for law school and seminary. The department acknowledges in the self-study it needs to do a better job of tracking majors, but anecdotally students told us they expect to apply to top M.A. and Ph.D. programs.

As of Fall 2015, the department served 29 undergraduate majors, as well as large numbers of students in other academic units with general education courses. The following table provides data on all the students who have been accepted into the program served in the period under review.
The table above shows major headcount is down substantially and diversity of students is limited. The faculty can clearly accommodate larger enrollments in their courses. However, the students don’t seem to be available. According to faculty interviewed during the site visit and as noted in the self-study report, they are not sure why enrollment is down, but enrollment has steadily declined since 2008. It is not clear from the self-study or the site visit that the department actively recruits majors beyond a session in the introductory service courses on the benefits and prospects of a philosophy major.

The chair speculates that the current economic climate and poor job prospects for professional philosophers may be suppressing interest. It should be noted that this trend is by no means confined to Ohio University; for whatever combination of reasons, enrollments are generally down in philosophy courses nationally. Yet philosophy remains essential to a liberal education worthy of the name.

**Does the undergraduate curriculum provide majors with an adequate background to pursue discipline-related careers or graduate work following graduation?**

The undergraduate curriculum, with its heavy emphasis on courses in logic and reasoning (taught by many department faculty), philosophy of science (taught by Profs Ehrlich, Briscoe, Carson, and Ishida), and ethics and social-political philosophy (taught mainly by Profs Bernstein, Hanisch, and Lent), prepares majors very well to pursue discipline-related careers outside of philosophy—such as careers in law, medicine, clergy, publishing, consulting, government work, computer programming—while at the same time preparing majors equally well to go on to graduate work in philosophy if they so choose. The faculty have developed dual list courses for undergraduate and graduate students, which have been challenging for undergraduate students, but which also have proved to generally be an excellent experience for them, as noted in our site visit meetings with students and faculty.
That said, it would certainly be desirable for the Department to strive to offer more courses on
the undergraduate level on an occasional basis representing modes or schools of philosophy that
cannot feasibly occupy a larger place in the curriculum, given the human resources available and
the need to maintain a viable and competitive MA program. This would include courses in
Continental Philosophy (such as Existentialism and Deconstruction), courses in Non-Western
philosophical traditions (such as Chinese or Indian Philosophy), and courses in philosophy of
race/gender/identity. But this is not to say that the Department has so far done nothing in that
direction; on the contrary, in recent semesters there have been offerings of Phenomenology and
of Islamic Philosophy.

The goal of most undergraduate students is to continue their education at the M.A. and Ph.D.
level and teach in a college or university. The faculty discussed other opportunities for
undergraduate students in business positions and other areas of study. Some undergraduates
use their undergraduate degree to pursue their education in law.

The department admits in the self-study that it needs to do a better job of tracking majors. There
is no data in the report as to where majors end up working, or going to graduate or law school,
but anecdotally several faculty members expressed pride in the graduate programs their students
attended, and the undergraduate students we talked with said they had no concerns about
pursuing the graduate programs or careers they were interested in.

Are the resources and the number of and distribution of faculty sufficient to support the
undergraduate program?

Currently the department has ten faculty members, two of which are Group II faculty, which
is adequate to meet the needs of the current teaching assignments. The department chair stated
the department is short one faculty member and has submitted proposals for a Group I faculty
to meet the teaching requirements for expansion of courses in diverse topics of philosophy.
While budgetary pressures and declining enrollment make that unlikely, the department has
received more support for a Group II line. Faculty support and faculty devotion toward the
students was noted by the reviewers during faculty interviews.

Are pedagogical practices appropriate? Is teaching adequately assessed?

Judging mainly from the wide assortment of syllabi made available to the committee, the
department’s pedagogical practices—in terms of topics covered, assigned readings, required
essays, exam formats, and opportunities for discussion and debate—are in line with high
standards in the profession.

Teaching efficacy is assessed in a variety of ways, including student evaluation questionnaires,
review of samples of required writing produced in courses, and classroom visits by the Chair to
courses in progress, especially those being taught by newer faculty members.

GRADUATE PROGRAM:

Is the program attracting students likely to succeed in the program? Is the number of
The Department of Philosophy M.A. graduate program attracts a good cadre of students who have generally applied to a variety of programs across the country and chose the philosophy program at Ohio University. The program is highly selective. Approximately 25 applications are received with one-fourth of those students being accepted into the program. These students are recruited from outside of Ohio University undergraduates, as much of the graduate program consists of courses that are dual listed with undergraduate classes. Thus, undergraduates have little reason to stay at Ohio University to pursue a graduate degree. But seeking and obtaining a master’s degree in philosophy at a different university from that awarding one’s bachelor’s degree is standard practice and usually counseled by advisors.

The department does not appear to do much in recruitment of these students. Thus, while the pool of students does include some female students, there is little diversity beyond gender. The chair indicated that philosophy is a field that traditionally tends to be dominated by white males in the student population. However, because the program cohorts remain small, there appears to be good collegiality between the students.

Students expressed some concern over the lack of diversity of philosophical approaches in the program. They expressed interest in additional coursework in the Continental style, Native American and Eastern philosophies. They were also concerned about the diversity of the reading materials and expressed interest in more feminist texts as well.

Students are highly engaged and report satisfaction with the program and faculty members. When asked how satisfied they were with their education, students said the personable nature, availability, and disposition of professors were a highlight of the program. One student said “If you show an eagerness to learn, they will reciprocate. I love that so much.” Another said “There are really supportive professors here that have confidence in my abilities and help me to develop my own thoughts and learn to critically think.”

**Does the graduate curriculum provide an adequate background to pursue discipline-related careers following graduation?**

The design and structure of the M.A. program are excellent. First, MA students are exposed to all the major subfields of philosophy in their two years at Ohio University, in part through the variety of courses offered because of the dual listing with undergraduate courses. The required graduate seminar offered every fall introduces new students to all faculty members and their specialties.

Second, the culminating M.A. thesis of approximately 60 pages is an important rite of passage toward the Ph.D. dissertation for students who go on to a doctoral program, and for those who don’t, it is an important and valuable exercise in serious and well-argued writing that many future careers outside philosophy will require.

Third, the Philosophy Forum that takes place every spring is an unusual and highly effective part of the M.A. program. It involves the selection of a recent book of importance by a major
philosopher as the focus of the forum, where the book is studied with care during the early part of the semester, with the author then coming to campus for a week to interact with the faculty and graduate students. This practice offers M.A. students exposure to philosophy at the highest level, which is inspirational as much as it is educational. The opportunity for intellectual and social interaction with thinkers of such stature both humanizes such scholars and makes their modeling of a successful philosophy career more effective.

Fourth, the overall requirement of 33 credit hours of coursework, or about 10 courses, is in line with M.A. programs elsewhere, as is the distribution requirement of at least one course in each of five major areas of philosophy, namely Logic, Ancient Philosophy, Modern Philosophy, Value Theory, and Metaphysics and Epistemology.

Students who complete the degree have been highly successful in continuing to top Ph.D. programs at UC San Diego, University of Cincinnati, and Indiana University. While many pursue Ph.D. programs, the graduates are also successful in securing professional positions in philosophy in a fairly difficult job market.

**Does the program provide adequate mentoring and advising to students to prepare them for discipline-related careers?**

The resources and the number and distribution of the faculty are clearly sufficient to support the graduate program. The most important aspect of that sufficiency resides in the scholarly attainments of the faculty and the demonstrated capacity of the faculty to convey their expertise and insights to students. The graduate students as a whole were virtually unanimous in their approval and appreciation of the intellectual quality of faculty and the effectiveness of their teaching, while especially underlining and valuing faculty openness, support, and availability vis-a-vis graduate students.

One example of the one-on-one mentoring graduate students get, beyond their research and classes, is the attention to writing and re-writing their Statement of Purpose for Ph.D. program applications, a crucially important part of such applications. Each SOP is reviewed and evaluated by multiple faculty members.

**Are the resources and the number of and distribution of faculty sufficient to support the graduate program?**

The resources appear to be sufficient to run the program. The department seems to have achieved a good balance between the demands of the undergraduate and graduate programs and is currently at a steady state. While the chair indicated that the M.A. program had the capacity to add an additional 4-5 students, the department might need to re-consider the financial model used to run the program and accept more fee-paying students. A study of peer M.A. programs would help the department look at the two-year, fully-funded model they currently use and right-size their financial package for students. However, as noted below, the availability of full funding is a major attraction for top graduate students to the program. Graduate students do provide service to the department by teaching courses that bring in additional revenue to the department in student weighted credit hours.
Does the program offer appropriate financial support to graduate students?

The M.A. program in Philosophy seems competitive with well-regarded ones at other universities, such as Tufts, Northern Illinois, and Wisconsin-Milwaukee, though it does not appear to have as high a profile or the same draw as those programs, at least judging from the number of applications per year, which has lately been on the order of 25-30. Still, OU’s program generally succeeds in recruiting 5 new, well-qualified M.A. students a year, all of whom are given full support, a decidedly attractive feature of the program that should at all costs be retained. In fact, the graduate students told the site team that while they were accepted into those other top programs, they indicated that the financial incentives provided by the department exceeded other comparable programs and was one of the major factors in their decision to select Ohio University.

Is teaching adequately assessed?

Since nearly all of the graduate courses are dual listed with undergraduate courses, the assessment of teaching is the same as for the undergraduate program.

COMMENDATIONS

Use of Dual List Courses
Nearly the entire graduate program is comprised of dual-listed courses. While it was initially an area of concern for the site team, talking to the students, both graduate and undergraduate, completely changed our mind. Bringing together the graduate and undergraduate students allows the department to provide a wider variety of courses to both. The courses are small and taught at a graduate level, challenging the undergraduate students to meet that standard. While the undergrads indicated that sometimes they are intimidated, they liked the challenge and thought it better prepared them for graduate school. The graduate students recognized that having the undergrads in the courses with them allowed a small graduate program to offer a much wider variety of courses than they as graduate students would otherwise be exposed to.

Faculty engagement with students
The site team was very impressed with the level of engagement of every faculty member with the students, both undergraduate and graduate. The students we talked with universally highly praised the faculty for their knowledge, research and willingness to share both. They discussed how interested faculty members were in their progress and success and their passion for the material they teach and research. One graduate student said, with enviable enthusiasm, “…every faculty member is absolutely brilliant!”

AREAS OF CONCERN

Diversity
The chair indicated that the philosophy field is one that is highly underrepresented in diversity and falls below even STEM fields in the recruitment of women and minorities. White males dominate the faculty and the student population. The department has been successful in recruiting two additional international faculty members, one of whom is Asian. The department chair expressed an interest in pursuing other avenues, such as opportunity hires, in order to bring
diversity into the faculty.

**Governance/Transparency**
There appears to be a lack of strategic planning about the development of the program. Financial information about RCM and how to structure programs for growth is not routinely shared with all faculty members. Some faculty members expressed concern that they are not informed about financial matters and department strategies for recruitment and growth.

The chair provided a list of faculty committees, but there do not appear to be regularly scheduled faculty meetings, only ones as needed. It appears that much of the decision-making and planning in the department is handled by an Executive Committee composed of the chair, the assistant chair and the graduate chair. To be fair, that’s a third of the faculty, but our discussions with other faculty indicated a lack of knowledge about what was going on with the department, and certainly a lack of strategic planning to deal with the issues of declining enrollment and weighted student credit hours.

**Assessment of Student Learning**
The self-study maintains that “the department continues to endorse the position that the best assessment of learning goals are the grades earned in our courses.” But grades are only an indication of performance on assignments given in class. Only if those assignments are directly tied to learning outcomes can they be considered assessment tools. A review of multiple syllabi showed a very uneven listing of learning outcomes—some had very good, measurable outcomes, other had no learning outcomes at all. Assignments varied widely in the degree to which they were directly tied to learning outcomes—again, some were very good measures, others seemed disconnected from learning outcomes if they were provided in the syllabus.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Diversity:** A few years back the department lost a female faculty member, leaving just one woman in the department of nine faculty. The department should look to balance its gender diversity and ethnic diversity with any new hires, especially the possible additional Group II line.

In the meantime, the department might also look at the diversity of its curriculum, its speaker series and other creative ways to expose students to diverse people and philosophies. A priority should be to more rigorously search for diverse candidates and to at least review more diverse applicants at the first level of review by the search committee.

**Governance/Transparency:** Engage faculty in strategic planning to explore recruitment strategies for undergraduate major and minor programs, implications of RCM, and ways to serve other departments/colleges on campus with targeted courses. The success of the online ethics course geared toward the nursing program is a good example of how such targeted courses can benefit the department. The Philosophy of Sport class was another, serving sports journalism and SASM majors. It should be noted that the department also regularly offers other courses in applied ethics, including business ethics, though for various reasons the colleges or schools concerned with those matters have not seen fit to require those courses of their majors. More generally, while many new courses have been added to the curriculum in the last six years, it is
unclear whether these have been developed as part of a strategic plan to move the department forward.

**Assessment:**
The department has recently implemented two new direct measures of learning outcomes, a pre-post test of concept knowledge, and an external review of senior capstone projects. Both are good direct measures of learning goals. We encourage the department to gather data from these measures and then ensure that the curriculum loop is closed, so that the department has confidence that all majors achieve the overall learning outcomes outlined in the self-study. In addition, all syllabi should be reviewed to ensure that learning outcomes are present, and that those outcomes are aligned with the department’s overall learning goals for students.

**OVERALL JUDGMENT:** The Philosophy Department undergraduate and graduate programs are **viable.**
Date: November 22, 2016

TO: David Ingram, Program Review Committee

FROM: Robert Frank, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

RE: Seven year review of Philosophy

This is my response to the 2016 report submitted for the Department of Philosophy seven year program review.

I join the reviewers in acknowledging the accomplishments of the faculty in the domains of scholarship and teaching. There is ample evidence of commitment to excellence in these domains. As noted in the report, the department has created a good environment for collaboration between tenure track and non-tenure track faculty, and has effectively combined graduate and undergraduate instruction in its upper level courses.

Declining enrollments are a concern, a trend shared by many humanities departments. However, the core content areas of philosophy related to critical thinking, quantitative reasoning and ethics continue to attract students and with some adjustments, I think philosophy courses and cross-departmental collaborations in these areas can draw more students to philosophy courses.

The diversity of the faculty within the Philosophy Department is less that it could be, and efforts will be made to diversify the faculty when opportunities arise. A more diverse faculty will likely attract a more diverse group of students. Outreach to minority-serving institutions may be a good way to increase enrollments in the graduate program. The reviewers’ suggestion of exposing students to a more diverse set of faculty role models through invited speakers is worthy of consideration.

I agree that more effort needs to be made to increase the transparency of decision-making within the department, and that the department needs to plan collaboratively to address the future challenges it faces.

To date, the efforts of the department to evaluate student learning have not been adequate despite consistent urging. The College will continue to insist that the Department move forward in this domain.