

Self Study  
Department of Philosophy  
Program Review  
2008-2009  
**Option C: Focused Inquiry**

## I. Mission and Goals

The Mission and Goals Statement of the Philosophy Department has undergone revision since the 2002 Program Review. The changes are reflected in the following. (Revisions are bolded.)

### Mission

The Philosophy Department of California State University, Sacramento, is an academic department within the College of Arts and Letters. The Department is composed of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and members of the community with an interest in philosophy. The mission of the Philosophy Department is to represent the discipline of philosophy, a discipline fundamental to the mission of the University, within the University and within the Sacramento region.

**Philosophy is a broad discipline, and while the Department is committed to maintaining teaching and scholarly competence in every area of philosophy, its focus is on applied ethics.**

### Goals

In accomplishing its mission to the University and to the Sacramento region **under the University's general 'Destination 2010' initiative**, the Department has five specific goals:

- (1) Offer the Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy **in three concentrations: General Major; Logic and Philosophy of Science; Applied Ethics and Law; in addition to offer an 'Honors' option applicable to the concentrations;**
- (2) Give all students in the University a rigorous and up-to-date acquaintance with the practice of philosophy, in General Education as well as by elective credit;
- (3) Offer a minor in Philosophy;
- (4) Provide service courses in philosophy for other disciplines:
  - (a) Applied and professional ethics
  - (b) Current theory
  - (c) Areas of intellectual history.
- (5) **Serve as a center for philosophy, in particular applied and professional ethics, within the Sacramento region. To build and maintain close relations with:**
  - (a) **Faculty and students from high schools, community colleges, and other institutions of higher education**
  - (b) **Alumni and other individuals with an interest in philosophy**
  - (c) **Institutions like state agencies, businesses, and other groups with needs in the area of applied ethics.**

Goals (1) and (2) are the major ones, and ranked equally in importance. Goals (3) and (4) **and (5)** are secondary goals, **ranked in that order.**

With regard to goal (2), the Department has as its goals in General Education:

- (1) to help students to gain an understanding and appreciation of the nature of philosophy, including an understanding of the major questions within it; acquaint students with influential philosophers and philosophical literature;
- (2) to help students develop analytical, critical, and verbal skills;
- (3) to help students achieve the educational goals of the specific areas of General Education in which philosophy courses are found.

### **Comments and Questions Regarding Mission and Goals**

The Department's goals have been developed, or in some respects revised, in response to the President's "Destination 2010" initiatives. Compared to the Bay Area and Southern California, the Sacramento Region continues to be underserved by institutions of higher education. Only Sacramento State and UC Davis offered baccalaureate-level instruction in philosophy. However, the situation can be expected to change with the entry into the region of several private colleges. The UC Davis Philosophy Department has national and international recognition as its focus. Philosophy faculty members in the community colleges, as well as in the increasing number of private higher education institutions make substantial contributions to the regional presence of philosophy. Nonetheless we believe that we are the natural center.

Since the last program review, the Department has responded to community needs in three particular instances:

- (1) Creation of the Center for Practical and Professional Ethics;
- (2) Beginnings of a Regional Philosophy Consortium involving philosophy faculty, as well as other interested parties;
- (3) Creation of an Honors Option within the Philosophy Major.

The Department lacks a graduate program. Although it contributes courses to the M.A. in Liberal Arts, it does so by cross-listing and lending faculty. As part of this program review we wish to solicit advice and recommendations regarding the possible development of a Master of Arts program in Philosophy.

- I.1. Is our mission consistent with the mission and goals of the University? Does it further those goals in such a way as to deserve greater institutional support?**
- I. 2. Is the goal of serving as a regional center of philosophy feasible and deserving of institutional support?**
- I.3. Are there goals the philosophy department of a major regional state university should adopt which are omitted in our statement?**

- I.4 No institution within the Region offers the Master of Arts in Philosophy or will admit students solely for the M.A. Is the development of a Master of Arts in Philosophy a reasonable goal, worthy of institutional support?**

## **II. Program**

### **The Major**

The Department offers the Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy in three concentrations:

- General
- Applied Ethics and Law
- Logic and Philosophy of Science

The requirements for the concentrations, including the proposed Honors concentration are in Appendix I.

The concentrations provide exposure to the main areas of philosophy. Each concentration requires at least one course in

- Logic
- History of philosophy
- Ethics
- Theory of Knowledge
- Metaphysics

Philosophy is a broad discipline. Students enter a philosophy program to pursue quite divergent questions: from the nature of mathematical truth to the requirements for a just state. The Department's program is devised to combine both sufficient depth with as much breadth as a small department can provide. The program embodies choices, as much in what to omit as to what to include.

### **General Major**

The General Major provides the widest choice of electives. It is designed to give a student a broad undergraduate-level knowledge of important philosophical topics, and to develop the analytical and critical skills needed to investigate them.

It is also designed to be 'sufficient'. That is, for the many students who major in philosophy with no intention of pursuing the discipline past the baccalaureate level, the General Major provides developed intellectual skills which are broadly applicable, and which prepare students for graduate study and/or a career in any intellectually rigorous profession.

## **Applied Ethics and Law**

The Concentration in Applied Ethics and Law (ETHL) is almost ten years old and has proved its popularity. It results from a 1994 program review in which the external consultant pointed out that we were sending many more majors to law school than we were sending to grad school in philosophy. That is, the Department had a hitherto-unnoticed mission. So in 1997 we began the deliberations for a pre-law track.

The resulting ETHL Concentration results from questions directed to graduates who had gone on to law school. We asked our former students about which subjects, and which skills, served them well in their legal preparation. The answers surprised us a bit. We were expecting them to say that they would like to have received more preparation in political and legal theory. Since we have only one course in each, PHIL 122 and PHIL 155, this would have required some additions to our course offerings. The students did not identify any particular subject they thought our program lacked.

Instead, our former students told us that we should make future prospective law students take all the logic and analytic courses they can. Their law professors were uninterested in their acquaintance with the details of various legal theories, nor with their attempts to apply theory. Vague theorizing about the concrete and practical cases which constitute the basis of legal education is met with impatience.

Law professors were interested in whether their students could generalize from particular cases, draw the correct inferences from complicated sets of facts, apply general principles, and understand why two very similar cases were decided differently. The professors were also interested in whether their students could write clear, cogent, and persuasive argumentative prose. Consequently, this concentration requires a seminar in which the student produces at least one major seminar paper. This paper can also be used as a writing sample for law school application.

So the ETHL Concentration is designed to ensure competence in those skills.

## **Logic and Philosophy of Science**

The idea for a Concentration in Logic and Philosophy of Science (LSCI) arose during deliberation on the ETHL Concentration, and they were approved together. It reflects the strength of our faculty in the areas logic and philosophy of science who wished to prepare majors for graduate study in these particular subareas in philosophy. The faculty involved wished also to tempt science and math majors into double majoring – a plan that has met with mixed success, given the University's high-unit science programs. We have had a number of Math/LSCI double majors.

## **Honors Option**

We wish to serve two purposes with the Honors Option: (i) attract more 'UC-eligible' students interested in philosophy; (ii) widen the range of graduate and professional programs to which our majors can apply with some hope for success. The Honors Baccalaureate requires significantly more upper-division units.

## **Minor in Philosophy**

The growth in the number of minors since 2002 results from the 2005 revisions in the Philosophy Minor in permitting a student to receive the minor by taking only General Education requirements. See the Appendix II for the change in Minor Requirements.

## **Comments and Questions Regarding Program**

Every concentration requires PHIL 60: Symbolic Logic and one or both of PHIL 25: History of Ancient Philosophy and PHIL 27: History of Early Modern Philosophy. This raises several issues:

1. Six-to-nine units of specific lower-division courses is an unusually large and strict set of requirements for a CSU philosophy department.
2. The Symbolic Logic course and the history cycle (PHIL 25: History of Ancient Philosophy and PHIL 27: History of Early Modern Philosophy) are rarely taught in community college; it is very difficult for students to satisfy those requirements before enrolling here.
3. Since PHIL 25 and PHIL 27 are also in GE it is difficult to pitch the material so that it provides sufficient preparation for the advanced major courses.
4. Furthermore, the philosophy courses students have taken, "Introduction to Philosophy" and "Critical Thinking" most prominently – the courses that inspired them to become philosophy majors in the first place – do not count toward the major.

### **II.1 Should we revise our lower division requirements in light of these issues? If so, how?**

**Should we, for instance, make any two lower division classes (except symbolic logic) satisfy the requirements for the Major?**

### **II.2 How does the structure of the minor affect our major? Should we make it easier for students in the minor to 'upgrade' to the major by permitting them to count any courses already taken?**

The overlap among concentrations is considerable: except for the choice of history courses in ETHL, the required core is the same across all of them. Furthermore, there is no course peculiar to any concentration. Consequently, a student can actually delay a choice of concentration until filing the graduation petition, since a course required in one concentration will serve as an elective in any other.

### **II.3 Do the concentrations have specific enough identities? Should we revise the curriculum by adding courses peculiar to specific concentrations?**

A problem noted in our last self study was that the department did not offer enough courses above 150 to enable students to satisfy requirements in a timely way. The self-study suggested that "(t)he solution is continued growth in the number of majors."

This has indeed been the solution. We are now able to offer the three required upper division courses: PHIL 112 or PHIL 152, PHIL 180, and PHIL 181 every semester in full confidence that they will attract enough students. In addition, we generally offer 4-5 courses above 150, including 190-level courses every semester.

An important issue facing the major is how to move to the next level in the quality of our student preparation. While our graduates have gone on to succeed in graduate programs nationally, it seems to be very difficult for our students to be admitted into a program of the first rank. We have never had a student accepted to, for instance, Cornell, Stanford, or UC Berkeley. We are hoping that the Honors program will help.

### **II.4 Does the increased attention and effort required for the Honors concentration merit increased institutional support, with perhaps a five-year assessment of how such increased support has improved our students' admissibility?**

#### **Curriculum**

The Department offers only 33 different courses. Even for a small department this is quite a concentrated list. The course list remains virtually unchanged since our 2005 decision to focus on applied ethics. Consequently, there is a need for additional courses. The question of focus arises even here. For instance, PHIL 104: Bioethics now covers ethical issues spanning everything from animal rights, the environment, to medical ethics and justice in the allocation of scarce medical resources.

Similarly, many professions have begun to call for some academic training in ethics and professional responsibilities as part of professional training. This has been true in law for decades, of course. But specialized accreditation bodies are also calling for a unit of ethics in accountancy, computer science, and engineering. The Department already offers two courses which serve as required courses within specific programs, PHIL 103: Business and Computer Ethics in the Computer Science B.S., and PHIL 104: Bioethics in the Health Science B.S.

The Department takes it as part of its applied ethics mission to serve this curricular need for other departments. We are already working closely with the Computer Science and Health Science departments to ensure that those courses do serve their student's needs. We stand ready to work with other departments as well. We are currently working with the College of Business and the Department of Criminal Justice.

Should the Philosophy Department have a special role within the University for ethics instruction within other departments? We have no desire to 'own' ethics at Sacramento State in the same way that the English Department, for instance, 'owns' composition. We are far too small to accomplish anything of the sort. But we do take it as part of our mission to insist that this element in the university-wide curriculum be done well, and to have some role in judging sufficiency.

It will be require some judicious balance to satisfy the demand for our courses from other departments with the needs of our own majors.

In addition to the applied ethics focus, the new Honors concentration may profit by its own dedicated courses.

### **Questions Regarding Curriculum**

- II.6 Should the Department have a special role in the University with regard to applied ethics and professional ethics teaching?**
- II.7 Retaining the Department's traditional parsimony with regard to adding new courses, which new courses could best serve our mission?**

## **Students**

### **Numbers**

The pattern of OIR's undercounting of philosophy majors continues from the last Program Review. For instance, OIR reports 100 majors for Fall 2006. Department records indicate 136.

Since the Department's advisement procedures involve the creation of a file for each major containing a "Major Requirements Worksheet" completed by the student, the latter figure (136) is certainly more accurate. The disparity may be due both to delays in registering declarations and changes of major and to student delay in 'officially' changing the major.

For the last three years the number of majors has remained constant both in the aggregate and as distributed among the concentrations.

	<u>Majors</u>	GEN	ETHL	LSCI	Unspec	<u>Minors</u>
Fall 2006	136	71	31	4	30	44
Spring 2007	132	71	31	4	28	65
Fall 2007	110	78	30	2		46
Spring 2008	121	87	28	5	1	28
Fall 2008	135	93	34	8		41

### **Patterns**

The traditional pattern, for the number of philosophy majors to increase with class level, continues:

- i. Very small numbers of freshmen (5-year Mean = 3);
- ii. Substantial growth at the junior level, involving both native students and transfers (5-year Mean = 15);
- iii. Ultimately, an average of 29 graduates per year. (Though the number of graduates is trending upward from 26 in 2003 to 33 in 2007.)

This is a national phenomenon. Since philosophy is not a high school subject in the United States, very few students begin their undergraduate careers as philosophy majors. The majority discover philosophy through exposure in General Education or breadth requirements.

### **A Peculiar Pattern**

A motivation peculiar to Sacramento State Philosophy, self-reported during major orientation and advisement sessions, is the attraction of the 36-unit requirement, the lowest on campus. In fact, the 36 units constitute an increase from the 33-unit requirement that prevailed until 2005, when the requirements for the General Major were raised to match the two other concentrations. For students wishing more preparation in philosophy the Department has proposed an Honors Option. This is described under 'Program'.

### **Outreach**

The Department has initiated the custom of having a meeting at the beginning of each semester to which majors, minors, and all interested students are invited. Besides announcement of departmental news (new appointments, colloquia, lectures) the students are informed about our advising procedures. We emphasize the importance of advisement during the junior and senior years. We also use this meeting to encourage – strongly encourage – those who have not yet declared their major to do so.

### Ethnicity

One significant change has occurred since 2002: a 50% rise in minority majors. The notable increase in students of Southeast Asian ancestry was already evident from student advisement files and in the changed ethnic mix of advanced classes.

It should also be noted that the Department continues its success in attracting and graduating Hispanic students.

### Gender

The Department matches nationwide patterns in the slow rise in the number of women entering philosophy. The same slow rise holds for the male/female ratio. Women now constitute a majority of undergraduate enrollment in the University. In humanities and arts women constitute a significant majority (in the College of Arts & Letters 60%). Philosophy constitutes an anomaly here. However, the percentage of female philosophy majors in our department, now a little over a third, is actually a significant rise from the one-fifth of five years ago.

The Department has made an effort to encourage interest in philosophy among women – arguably an insufficient one. PHIL 123: Philosophy and Feminism was added to the Department's curriculum. However, since it is not in General Education, it has not commanded sufficient student interest to be offered regularly. The rise in the number of women majors must be traceable to changes in the interests of women students themselves.

### **Comments and Questions Regarding Students**

**II.8: What more should the department do by way of 'outreach' to groups whose participation in philosophy is lower than their participation in higher education generally?**

**II.9 Should the General Education Committee allow PHIL 123: Philosophy of Feminism to satisfy the "Race and Ethnicity in American Society" GE requirement?**

### **Conclusion**

While the Department can improve in a number of areas concerning 'outreach', and we are soliciting advice and support in how to improve, the program itself raises no fundamental issues needing university attention.

### **III. Assessment**

The Department's 'Assessment Plan' has been in force and operating since Spring Semester of 2000. Indeed, the Department began implementation in Fall 1999 even before approval.

The text of the Assessment Plan can be found in the Appendix III. The matrix of assessment outcomes by course is Appendix III.5

### **Assessment Plan Procedures**

#### **1. Regular Curriculum Assessment**