Academic Program Review

Department of Philosophy

Review Team

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Individuals Interviewed

Donald Taylor, Assistant Vice President, Academic Affairs
Sheree Meyer, Dean of College of Arts and Letters
Christina Bellon, Associate Dean of College of Arts and Letters
Chevelle Newsome, Dean of Undergraduate Studies (interim)
Amy Liu, Director of Academic Program Assessment
Russell DiSilvestro, Chair of Philosophy Department
Amy Trimmer, Administrative Support Cordinator
Philosophy Department tenured faculty
Philosophy Department junior faculty
Philosophy Department lecturers
Philosophy Department current students
Philosophy Department alumni (via Zoom)

Documents Consulted

Department of Philosophy Self Study: Focused Inquiry, September 2017.
External Consultant Report: Department of Philosophy, by Michael Cholbi, April 2018.
Academic Program Review Report: Philosophy, by Thomas Krabacher (Geography), April 2010.
Fact Book: Philosophy Fall 2012 – Spring 2017. CSU, Sacramento.
http://www.csus.edu/oir/datacenter/departmentfactbooks/philosophy17.pdf
Philosophy Alumni Survey, 2014.
Philosophy Department Annual Assessment Report, 2015-2016.

Background of the Focused Inquiry

In the Self-Study Report dated September 2017, the Philosophy Department conducted a detailed data analysis from 2012 to 2017, aiming the focused inquiry at the Department's effectiveness in graduation rate and time to degree, which was one of the CSU-Sacramento University's top priority.

The Philosophy Department currently has 110 majors (Philosophy Fact Book 2017), and the number is relatively consistent in the last five year in between 101-128. According to the External Consultant, the Philosophy major norm is around 0.5% of the university total for a comprehensive university. For CSU—Sacramento campus, the Philosophy majors should be 135-150 based on the university students total of 27,000-30,000.

The philosophy major first-time freshman students came in with lower high school GPA than that of college mean or the university mean, and 65.1% need remediation compared to 57.4% at college and 55.5% at the university level. The philosophy major transfer students had slightly lower transfer GPA than the college mean and the university mean, but the gap is much smaller compared to freshmen with the high school GPA. In 2016, the Philosophy Department retention rate and graduation rate are relatively low compared with the college total. But the numbers fluctuate in the last five years and in 2014, the Philosophy Department had a higher graduation rate than the college or the university rates. Overall, the number of graduates each year in Philosophy Department is relatively small and it is more likely to have fluctuation than that in large departments.

The Philosophy Department faculty had a growth in part-time faculty since the last program review. There are six tenured professors, four assistant professors, and 17 lecturers as of 2017, compared to seven, three, and five respectively back in 2010.

Responses to Prior Program Review Report in 2010

In the previous program review conducted in 2010, there were 11 recommendations and 10 of them have been addressed at least partially. Here are the recommendations and updates:

- **2010 Recommendation # 1: The Department should institute a stronger mentoring system for junior faculty, particularly in the areas of RTP expectations and course evaluations.**

  The recommendation was largely based on a tenure denial before the 2010 program review. It is now fully addressed. During the separate meeting with junior faculty, all indicated that mentoring efforts are adequate, and they know the expectations of RTP. The Department Chair shared two interventions to address tenure denial situation: (1) A formal meeting in the week before semester begins to share the best practice in teaching. All faculty are invited to bring forward problems or challenges they have faced in their teaching, successful measures to address past challenges, sample assignments and rubrics; (2) Monthly mentoring meeting for new hires in the first year with the Department Chair and the most recently tenured faculty.

- **2010 Recommendation # 2: To the extent possible, the Department should look for ways of meaningfully including lecturers in program and Department activities.**

The Department made conscious efforts to include lectures in its symposia and department meetings. Lecturers speak freely and vote on some departmental policies, such as online student evaluations. Lecturers recommended using text books under the CSU systemwide Affordable Learning Solution's guidelines was adopted. Lecturers indicated satisfaction with their inclusion.

- **2010 Recommendation # 3: The Philosophy Department should review advising practices with the goal of bringing majors (and minors) into the advising process earlier in their academic program.**

Faculty partially addressed by noting that online advising has facilitated advising earlier in students' academic careers. However, students and alumni suggested that they prefer more proactive advising. See new recommendation #5. Faculty advising information is readily available from the department Website https://www.csus.edu/phil/guidance/academic-advising.html.

- **2010 Recommendation # 4: The Philosophy Department should address the tension between major and service course goals (esp. in G.E.) for those course offerings that fulfill both functions.**

The introduction of lower division history of philosophy courses resolved this issue.

- **2010 Recommendation # 5: The Philosophy Department should give serious consideration to developing upper-division counterparts to PHIL 25 and PHIL 27, primarily intended for majors, to ensure that major preparation in these areas is of rigor.**

The new courses PHIL 26, a lower division history of philosophy course, PHIL 127, an upper division history of ancient philosophy course, and PHIL 128, an upper division history of modern philosophy course provide the preparation and rigor previously lacking in the program.

- **2010 Recommendation # 6. The Philosophy Department should seek to clarify and strengthen links between activities undertaken by the Center for Practical and Professional Ethics and its curriculum for the Philosophy major and minor. The Department should specifically seek out way by which the Center's activities may be used to enrich the major curriculum.**

The introduction of a student essay contest and the use of students as panelists/moderators at the Center events have partially enriched and strengthened curriculum. However, the funding of the Center remains an issue and this will be discussed in the new recommendation to the College of Arts and Letters.

- **2010 Recommendation # 7: The Philosophy Department should explore the possibility of establishing an internship program for undergraduate majors, possibly in connection with Center for Practical and Professional Ethics.**

The Department has been partially successful. While still not having a formal mechanism to assist students in finding internships, job placement for philosophy majors are successful according to students and alumni. The External Consultant also has reservations about the formal internship program since Philosophy has a wide job market and philosophy students are not limited only to careers in those fields for which formal internship opportunities exist.

- **2010 Recommendation # 8: The Philosophy Department not pursue the possibility of establishing a M.A. degree program in Philosophy at this time.**
Neither faculty nor administration exhibit interest in the M.A. program at this time.

- **2010 Recommendation # 9: It is imperative that the Philosophy Department work with the university assessment coordinator to develop and implement a workable student learning outcomes assessment plan that satisfies both University and WASC requirements, which include:**
    1) **Identification of a measurable set of student learning outcomes;**
    2) **Methods (including direct measures) for assessing those outcomes;**
    3) **Demonstrated mechanism for using the assessment results in programmatic planning.**

The Department in consultation with the Director of Academic Assessment indicated that the most significant developments the Philosophy Department has made is to put into place practical assessment practices. The Department utilizes the direct and indirect measures for discipline-specific Program Learning Outcomes (PLO's) and university Baccalaureate Learning Outcomes (BLO's). Every year, each faculty will have their class visited and peer-reviewed by other faculty members and the Department periodically reflects on how to revise its curriculum and pedagogy to enable students to meet both PLO's and BLO's. The decision on hiring new faculty is also based on their ability to advance PLO's and BLO's. In the conversation with the College Dean and the Associate Dean, they considered the Department has gone from lagging behind to a leader in the area of implementing assessment into teaching and learning practice. We encourage the Philosophy Department to continue its successful assessment practices.

- **2010 Recommendation # 10: The department should seek permission to hire a full-time faculty member in the area of applied ethics as soon as circumstances permit.**
This hiring recommendation has been addressed. Multiple faculty with interests in applied ethics have been hired since 2010.

- **2010 Recommendation # 11: The Department and the Dean of the College should work together to find a way by which support for the Center for Practical and Applied Ethics can be made available in the form of additional assigned time.**
This is the only recommendation that is largely unaddressed. The desired support for assigned time has not materialized. The funding for the Center remains an issue. This will be discussed in the new recommendation to the College and the University.

Commendations

We concur with the External Consultant's nine commendations to the Philosophy Department and we reorganized, consolidated, and added some information.

1. The leadership of the Department, including but not limited to the past and current chairs and the directors for the Center for Practical and Applied Ethics, are universally lauded for their integrity, conscientiousness, and thoroughness.
2. The Department is widely regarded as an exemplary citizen among College and University administrators, playing its part in advancing the university's mission and culture, as well as responding thoughtfully to feedbacks and to institutional initiatives. The Department was especially proactive and intentional in implementing recommendations made in the previous program review in 2010.
3. The Department's curriculum for majors and for General Education contributed to the three WASC competences greatly: critical thinking, written communication, and oral communication. The graduates from the Philosophy Department had job opportunities in a wide variety fields and successful alumni contributed to the critical thinking and written/oral communication skills learned at Sac State.
4. The Department has established a highly collaborative approach to the assessment and assurance of teaching quality among its faculty.
5. The Department's emphasis on applied ethics, implemented in 2005, has given it needed outward-looking direction and purpose.
6. The Department has established a serious and vibrant scholarly atmosphere, with nearly all of its faculty actively pursuing programs of research.
7. The Department has diversified its population of students majoring in Philosophy along measurers of race/ethnicity.
8. Relationships among the Department's tenure-track faculty, lecturers, and students are strong and supportive. The Department is "amazingly cohesive" and "high functioning." Students trust that the faculty will be responsive to their needs and concerns.
9. Through programs such as those facilitated by the Center for Practical and Professional Ethics, the Department makes a demonstrable contribution to the intellectual climate of the University.

Recommendations to the Department

1. **The Department should incorporate a methods-based, seminar style course into its curriculum to smooth students' transition from the lower-level General Education courses through which they are typically introduced to philosophy and the more demanding upper-level courses required of Department majors**.

The External Consultant sees a disconnect that needs to be bridged between lower-division General Education (GE) Philosophy courses and the upper-division courses. Many students are frustrated or some even discouraged after taking the first major course. According to Georgia State University's data, the first major course is strongly predictive of subsequent academic success (Dimeo 2017). During meetings with students and alumni, some reported that the transition from GE to major courses is "daunting" and the rough transition disengaged some potential philosophy majors as the result.

We recommend that the Department implement a methodology course between its lower-division and upper-division curricula intended solely for students new to the major, whether transfers or natives to Sac State. This methods or pro-seminar course would emphasize the deliberate practice of skills essential to successful undergraduate study in philosophy: slow, careful, sympathetic reading of philosophical texts, reconstruction of arguments, the fashioning of relevant and forceful objections to philosophical positions or arguments, and the incorporation of these skills into written philosophical work.

Such a course is also an opportunity to develop discipline-specific information literacy, e.g., how to effectively find, evaluate, organize, and use such resources as Google Scholar or PhilPapers.org, as well as an opportunity to practice oral communication and teamwork, two skills which both the most recent alumni survey and our interactions with students and alumni indicated merit more attention in the Department's teaching. Such a course might also mitigate the problem of students taking courses in sequences that are not optimal for overall academic progress. The Department should assess the course's efficacy and this will be addressed in more detail in the Discussion Section.

This transitional course would have the additional advantage of creating a cohort of student majors. It could also function to stimulate student thinking about post-baccalaureate study or careers. From an assessment point of view, the course could be a source of artifacts that could be used in tandem with student work from PHL189 as the basis for a longitudinal student assessment. Lastly, by integrating students into the major and its expectations more fully and completely, the course may serve to improve the chances of academic retention and success among female students. The Department is still not very successful in students gender diversity.

2. **The Department should identify ways to "localize" its curriculum or pedagogy, highlighting more explicitly the links between its course content (and co-curricular programs) and issues or concerns facing the Sacramento region.**

Most of the sources consulted for this review endorsed the proposition that the Department, despite its applied ethics focus, was not taking maximal advantage of its geographic location as the California state capital. Few of its courses and relatively few of its co-curricular activities invite reflection on problems specific to, or that have an especially strong valence in, the Sacramento region. These efforts could include guest speakers from local governments, businesses, and institutions, as well as conferences or other events with regional foci. Such efforts could strengthen the Department's relationships with the community and with other university departments, as well as attracting students who perceive philosophy as a tool for identifying and resolving challenges facing their own communities. Furthermore, cooperation with local government and business will increase the likelihood of job placement for the current students and recent graduates.

3. **The Department should retain its Logic and Philosophy of Science (LPS) track while considering a rebranding that better integrates LPS into the Department.**

The Philosophy Department Self-study had some discussion regarding the viability of the LPS program. While small, faculty perceive it to be a high-quality program that attracts some of its strongest students. The External Consultant recommended rebranding instead of discontinuance. We recommend to keep the specialization and to rename LPS by adding the word "Technology" (LPST) and integrate the program into the Department's applied ethics identity.

4. **The Department should undertake an initiative to ensure that a prescribed percentage of texts assigned in its courses are by women authors.**

Both the Department Self-Study and the External Consultant expressed concerns about the gender composition of the Philosophy student body. Faculty expressed some surprise that approximately one-third of their recent graduates are female, and the Philosophy's percentage of female lags behind that the Math major, which historically has low percentage of female students. The University's overall female enrollment is over 50%, as do most universities in the United States. Some researchers (Flaherty 2013, Thompson 2016) suggested to increase the proportion of female authors which will attract more female students into the philosophy major. Given the high level of cohesiveness within the Department surrounding teaching, this could improve its gender diversity.

5. **The Department should pursue more aggressive approaches to student advising, including mandatory office hours or the placement of registration holds for students who have not received regular mandated advising.**

During meetings with students and alumni, we discovered that very few students actively have ever sought out opportunities for faculty interaction even though that academic advising and other forms of interaction with faculty are readily available within the Department. Most students/alumni often want to get career guidance from faculty, but students can also make choices regarding 1) the order in which they pursue their coursework, and 2) their overall course load and time to degree. But many students failed to initiate the first step to email or call a faculty. We recommend that the Department consider a more proactive approach to advising by make it mandatory or requiring visiting faculty during office hours for some courses.

6. **The Department could offer co-curricular activity to promote the philosophy major, such as an Ethics Bowl.**

The External Consultant's report emphasized the importance of Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl (http://appe-ethics.org/ethics-bowl/) which is a high impact and high visibility activity that would be a strong fit for the Department's applied ethics identity. It also provides students with a culminating academic experience in which they publicly demonstrate their abilities in oral communication and teamwork, two areas where, based on the alumni survey of 2014, the Department was found to be comparatively less effective. It thus tends to attract motivated, high-achieving students to the major. In addition, it creates a set of very articulate student ambassadors to advocate for ethics education.

These advantages notwithstanding, Ethics Bowl presents considerable logistical and pedagogical challenges. Funding for the requisite student travel must be secured. The External

Consultant suggested that Ethics Bowl thrives when departments integrate it into their curriculum and have an instructor willing to commit to the course for a multi-year span.

7. **The Department should communicate regularly with lecturers about departmental or university developments likely to affect lecturers' work/life. An electronic newsletter each semester is recommended.**

The relationship among full-time faculty are strong and lecturers may benefit from being kept up to date about the Department/University activities that bear on their work/life. We recommend the Chair to provide an overview of recent development relevant to lecturers, such as the cessation of remediation and its impact on GE courses taught more by lecturers.

8. **Department should implement initiatives to foster greater contact among students and between current students and alumni, including peer mentoring.**

Both students and alumni interviewed for this review indicated that they would welcome the Department facilitating more contact among students and between students and alumni, especially for purposes of career guidance/networking and academic support. A peer mentor program is one form that such initiative might take.

Recommendations to the College and the University

1. **The College should further clarify the Philosophy Department's relationship to Center for Practical and Professional Ethics and discuss with the College Dean to explore potential funding for the Center.**

Currently, the Director of the Center has the service commitment for directing the Center but has not been properly compensated by either release time from the University or the reduction of College or Department service requirement. The Center's Web site https://www.csus.edu/cppe/ focused on ethics in business and in the political science arena. At first impression, there is no connection between the Center and the Philosophy Department. The External Consultant asked whether the Center Director has always been a Philosophy Department faculty which it is. We recommend the College of Arts and Letters and the Department work with the College for Continuing Education (CCE) to explore the new funding revenue through CCE's government and corporate ethics training programs. The College and the Department should provide commensurate reduction on Center Director's other service obligations before the new funding or release time is available.

2. **The College should focus on the service need for tenure-track faculty and have a more balanced tenure density. The tenure-track faculty can provide the advising and pay close attention to student success.**

The Department's part-time faculty increased from 5 to 17 in the last 6-7 years, while full time faculty (including FERP) remained at 10. The high reliance on lecturers for instruction has many benefits, but it has certain disadvantages since non-tenure-accruing faculty do not have service or research responsibilities. Both the fulltime faculty and the External Consultant expressed some concerns related to the low tenure density at the Philosophy Department. However, the External Consultant also lauds the tenure-track faculty specializations which have well-rounded coverage of main areas of philosophy. To avoid the duplication of faculty areas of expertise, we

recommend to focus on teaching pedagogy, ethics in high-tech, and student advising etc., essential to the Department's commitment to student success.

3. The College and the Department should explore ways to support faculty scholarship at critical junctures in arcs of research.

The Philosophy Department has many highly engaged researchers as faculty. The External Consultant cited the research that for humanities faculty at teaching institutions, judicially timed interventions have a significant positive impact on research productivity. We recommend the College and the Department collaborate in supporting research by modestly reducing teaching responsibilities for tenure-track faculty at critical junctures in their scholarly activities. One course release time per semester could be allocated on the basis of criteria such as: faculty received "revise and resubmit" manuscript, speaking invitations in a professional conference, a book proposal was received by an academic press, etc. In a campus where pre-tenure course release is not the norm after the first two years, such an intervention would be a worthwhile investment in faculty scholarly productivity by the College and the Department.

Focused Inquiry Discussion

In its Self-study Report, The Philosophy Department undertook a detailed analysis of five years of data related to graduation rate, time to degree, et al. The analysis categorized data in terms of concentration, gender, native vs. transfers, previous major, minor, years to degree, additional major, student course load, grade point average, etc. The Department intended to identify "remediable impediments to earning a degree in Philosophy in a timely manner," which is a top priority for the University. Our finding is in consistent with Self-Study and External Consultant's reports. Students with higher GPAs have shorter times to degree; transfer students with the intention of majoring in philosophy have shorter times to degree than native students who switch to philosophy major. However, we found that students are often taking too few courses (12-13 units) or taking courses in sequences that inhibit their academic progress and the graduation rate. Recommendations 1 & 5 introduce a method-based pro-seminar course for majors and proactive advising could increase graduation rates.

The Self-study Report also stated that the Department's gender ratio is "close to parity with respect to enrolled majors, but only 35% of our graduates are women, this implies that women are overrepresented in students who leave the program." We recommend the Department do more outreach and marketing to female student in recruitment, retention and graduation. One possibility is Recommendation 4, to have 15% to 25% required reading by female authors. We also believe more advising from female faculty may help female students' retention and graduation rate.

The only issue remaining from the previous Program Review Report (2010) is the relationship of Center for Practical and Professional Ethics with the Department, including funding/release time for the Center. We recommendation the College and the University explore support for the Center. The Center is an asset to the College and the Director of the Center has been a volunteer faculty member from the Philosophy Department. The practical and professional ethics training to the business community and government entities has some promising

potentials in the Sacramento area. It needs an innovative approach and partnership with College of Business and College of Continuing Education in order to bring in funding to the Center and provide release time for the Director.

Overall, the Department of Philosophy is in a noticeably healthier state than during the 2010 program review. The Department has grown in size and it has a very proactive strategy toward student learning and academic success. Its faculty take their work seriously and the Department provides a high-quality education for its students. The 2015/16 Annual Assessment Report lauded the students' competence with respect to its learning outcomes as "Inquiry, Analysis, and Synthesis."

The Department is also lauded for the thoroughness and care with which it undertakes assessment with measuring tools for program specific learning outcomes and the university wide bachelorette learning outcomes. The Philosophy Department has a regular, systematic and comprehensive assessment of every faculty's teaching and now it is a leader in the university assessment program. The applied ethics focus suits its position within the University and the location of CSU—Sacramento, as well as reflecting a growing interest within the philosophy discipline in the practical application. Offering several distinct programs, the Department attracts students with a diverse background and interests. The faculty specialties cover all the areas of Philosophy and at the same time, the faculty share a clear understanding of the heart of the philosophical enterprise and what a student with a philosophical education should be expected to know. This shared understanding is most evident in its use of a common rubric and template for analytical essays.

Recommendation to the Faculty Senate

Based on this program review, the Self-Study report, and the External Consultant's report, the Review Team recommends that the degree programs in Philosophy be approved for six years or until the next scheduled program review.

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