

Philosophy Program Review

College of Arts

Dean's Summary

Submitted by:

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Accepted by:

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Philosophy Program Review

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The Philosophy department offers a Major, Extended Minor, Minor and an Applied Ethical and Political Philosophy (AEPP) minor. Program content is currently delivered by 5 full-time faculty members and a range of sessional instructors. 35 sections are taught by regular faculty and 14 sections by sessional instructors.

In May 2016, External Program Review Committee (PRC) members conducted a two-day site visit. The PRC met with faculty, staff, both the outgoing and incoming Heads, one academic advisor, one librarian, the Director of Teaching and Learning, the AVP of Research, Engagement and Graduate Studies, the Senior Advisor of Indigenous Affairs, the Dean, the two Associate Deans of the College of Arts, the AVP Institutional Research & Planning, the Research Analyst and the Provost and Vice-President, Academic.

The PRC noted that the Philosophy department at UFV is an exceptionally collegial, hard-working unit and that faculty members are devoted to student success. (The Department of Philosophy External Review, p 3) They noted that students "who have already graduated are excellent ambassadors for the department and for the University as a whole." (p 3)

The main concern of the PRC is that the department is "seriously understaffed" noting that, at present, "there are only four active full-time permanent faculty members" but that when Philosophy became a department separate from Political Science in 2013, there were seven full-time faculty members. (p 3)

PROGRAM CURRICULUM, STANDARDS, AND DELIVERY

The PRC noted that the UFV Department of Philosophy satisfy the objectives of DQAB. (p 7) They noted that "the fact that UFV graduates with degrees in Philosophy have been accepted into professional schools and good graduate programs provides substantial evidence that the quality of the credential is not only recognized but also respected." (p 7) They noted that students who graduate from this program have been successful in gaining admission to professional programs and graduate programs in philosophy. (p 5)

The PRC observed that the Philosophy department offers good coverage of philosophical topics and that its emphasis on practical or applied philosophy is quite strong; this was noted as a good point of differentiation from programs at many competitor universities. (p 4) They noted that range and variety of courses offered is impressive for such a small unit and that this promotes student choice. (p 7) Traditional core areas of philosophy, especially epistemology and metaphysics, were seen to be adequately represented despite the small faculty complement. (p 7) The PRC was satisfied with the prerequisite structure of the Philosophy program. (p 5)

Recommendations and Actions

1. Review long term feasibility of unusual courses that are tied to the expertise of particular individuals, e.g., philosophy for counsellors, decision-making and dispute resolution, and philosophy of children.
ACTION: The Dean will take this into account with future retirements and hires.
2. Recommendation: Applied philosophy could be better implemented across the institution.
ACTION: The department has started conversations with other areas such as Criminology to explore teaching ethics courses in these programs. The department is also collaborating with Economics to offer the first iteration of PHIL 412. It will explore links with Agriculture and Nursing.
3. Recommendation: Address obvious gaps in course offerings such as: feminist philosophy, bioethics, philosophy of natural science, and business ethics.
ACTION: An appointment in Applied Ethics will be made as soon as funds are available for such.

TEACHING FACULTY AND RESOURCES

The PRC recognized Faculty members presently in the department as good philosophers and good teachers with an exemplary dedication to the success of their students. The level of collegiality and mutual respect among faculty members was described as very high. (p 8)

Recommendations and Actions

1. Too few faculty members are spread too thinly over too many courses. The need to replace missing faculty is a priority for this program.
ACTION: An appointment in Applied Ethics will be made as soon as funds are available for such.
2. Some rebalancing of resources is in order with regard to those devoted to non-program and program students.
ACTION: The Dean will address this with the Department Head.
3. Due to the mandate of UFV, traditional scholarship, in the form of peer-reviewed conference presentations and publications, is not (on average) particularly strong by the usual standards of measurement.
ACTION: The Dean, Associate Dean of Faculty and AVP Research, Engagement and Graduate Studies will work with faculty to explore options for increased research and scholarship.
4. Resources for engaging in scholarship are presently insufficient for a university program.
ACTION: Funds for research are currently restricted with regard to PD and research and scholarly releases. However, of late, faculty have been granted full year sabbaticals, which should contribute to improved research profiles.
5. The above observations are also relevant to “succession planning” which must take place.
ACTION: The Dean will work on this with the Associate Dean of Faculty, AVP HR, AVP Research, Engagement and Graduate Studies as well as the Head of the department.

ALIGNMENT WITH UNIVERSITY AND FACULTY PRIORITIES

The PRC noted that the academic focus, curriculum, and delivery of programs in Philosophy appear to align well with the overall priorities of the University and the College of Arts.

Recommendations and Actions

1. Alignment with the UFV Education Plan (2016-20): “Collaborate Across Boundaries” and “Develop Local and Global Citizenship” could be strengthened with the department enhancing its profile in these areas. Examples given included more ‘service’ courses and cross-listed offerings as well as greater ties with the office of Indigenous Affairs with respect to how philosophy may play a valuable role in the indigenization initiative.

ACTION: Plans are in place to develop courses in both East Asian Philosophy and World Philosophy. Currently, PHIL 353 “Philosophies of India” and IPK 386 “Indigenous Worldviews in North America” can be counted toward satisfaction of the History of Philosophy requirement for students who major in Philosophy. In the Applied Ethical and Political Philosophy Minor, lower-level options include ANTH 211 “Aboriginal Peoples in BC: Contemporary Issues” and CRIM 211 “Indigenous Peoples, Crime, and Criminal Justice.” PHIL 412 focuses on how Locke’s theory of private property has been used to justify imperialism and colonialism. The department will continue to work on the indigenization of its courses and classrooms.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The PRC noted that “the student experience in UFV’s Department of Philosophy appears to be exceptionally good, especially for majors. The quality of the program in terms of its value for students is its greatest asset. This asset must be protected and should continue to function as the main standard of assessment.” (p 12). They noted that “students are quite remarkable in their appreciation of the education provided by the Philosophy department at UFV.” (p 12)

Recommendations and Actions:

1. Increase offerings as it can sometimes be difficult for students to take the courses they need in order to complete their degrees in a timely fashion. This concerns the fact that there are a small number of faculty members.

ACTIONS: Hiring will proceed when possible. The Dean will also work with the Associate Dean of Students to assess scheduling of courses for timely completion of the degree.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Faculty members in Philosophy work together exceptionally well. The chair provides leadership, but decision-making is collegial. (p 14)

Recommendations and Actions:

1. The PRC noted that the department expressed a desire for a dedicated academic counselor but suggested that priority be placed on two academic hires before this conversation proceed.
ACTION: The Dean will explore the option of faculty acting as mentors with the Department Head.

ALIGNMENT WITH COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY NEEDS

The PRC noted that the Philosophy department “appears to be quite conscientious about taking into account the needs of the surrounding community.” (p 15). It also noted the work done by faculty members for Elder College and in running Philosophy Cafés. It was impressed by the department’s involvement in running “Think Fun” summer camps for children, which employ the internationally accepted, UNESCO-endorsed Philosophy for Children method to teach thinking skills to children. (p 15)

The PRC noted that “available data indicate that students who have already graduated from UFV with a philosophy major have done very well indeed. The largest group of respondents has gone on to pursue advanced degrees in philosophy. Law school was the second most popular choice, and others have pursued different forms of higher education.” (p 15)

ENROLMENT, RETENTION AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Recommendations and Actions

1. Attract and retain more female students beyond the level of introductory and service courses.
ACTION: The Dean, Department Head and Recruitment will discuss these issues
2. More explicit and proactive strategies are required to expose students to the discipline.
ACTION: The department will explore targeting high schools and continue to use the “Think Fun” summer to introduce very young children to the discipline. It will also expand “service courses.” The department conducts bi-annual visits to Sardis Secondary in Chilliwack where various department members have “guest lectured.”