

Final Assessment Report for the 2017-2018 Cyclical Program Review of the BA and MA in Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Laurier's Institutional Quality Assurance Procedures ([Policy 2.1](#)), this Final Assessment Report provides a summary of the review process for the Department of Philosophy prepared by the Quality Assurance Office, along with an identification of strengths of the program(s) under review authored by the Dean of Arts and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. All recommendations made by the external review committee are listed in order, followed by a summary of the Department of Philosophy's response, and the Dean's response. Recommendations not approved for implementation have been identified, and those that have been prioritized are listed in the Implementation Plan.

The Final Assessment Report is reviewed and approved by the Associate Vice-President: Teaching and Learning and the Vice-President: Academic. Following completion of the Final Assessment Report, it is approved by the Program Review Sub-Committee and Senate Academic Planning Committee. Approval dates are listed at the end of this report. Final Assessment Reports are submitted to Senate as part of an annual report on cyclical reviews, and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance for information. Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Reports are posted on the public-facing page of the [Quality Assurance Office](#) website.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW PROCESS

The Department of Philosophy's last cyclical review took place in 2010-2011. The programs being reviewed were the Honours Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, Honours Bachelor of Arts in Combination, and the Master of Arts in Philosophy. The Self-Study was authored by the Department Chair and Graduate Advisor, with feedback provided from department faculty. In addition to the Self-Study (Volume I), the Department also submitted a copy of full-time faculty curricula vita (Volume II), a volume of course syllabi, and a list of proposed external reviewers (Volume III). A draft of the Self-Study was reviewed by the Quality Assurance Office, Dean of Arts and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies prior to submission of the final version.

As per Laurier's IQAP, the external review committee for the review consisted of two external reviewers from outside the university, and one internal reviewer from Laurier but outside of the department. The review committee was selected by the Program Review Sub-Committee on September 14, 2017, and the site visit was scheduled by the Quality Assurance Office for December 11-12, 2017.

The review committee consisted of Dr. Simon Dalby from the School of International Policy and Governance at Wilfrid Laurier, Dr. Mark Kingwell from the Department of Philosophy at the University of Toronto, and Dr. Jeff Noonan from the Department of Philosophy at the University of Windsor. During the two-day site visit, the review committee met with the following individuals and groups:

- Dr. Kathy Behrendt, Chair of the Department of Philosophy

- Dr. Richard Nemesvari, Dean of Arts
- Ms. Charlotte Innerd, Head of Collections and Ms. Joanne Oud, Liaison Librarian
- Dr. Paul Jessop, Acting Vice-President: Academic and Dr. Kathryn Carter, Associate Vice-President: Teaching and Learning
- Graduate students
- Full-time faculty
- Dr. Douglas Deutschman, Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- Contract Academic staff
- Dr. Byron Williston, Undergraduate Advisor
- Undergraduate students
- Dr. Neil Campbell, Graduate Advisor
- Ms. Kristine Dyck, Administrative Assistant

The reviewer committee submitted their completed report on January 5, 2018. The executive summary from the report is provided below.

External Reviewers' Report Executive Summary

The Philosophy department is doing a superb job, at both the Undergraduate and Graduate levels, even as its full time faculty complement has shrunk by 5. The number of majors and the overall enrollment in Philosophy classes are both healthy, even if they have dipped somewhat from historic highs. There is an excellent working relationship among the faculty and a dedicated group of contract instructors. The students that we interviewed were satisfied with the program and a genuine spirit of intellectual community pervaded the department. While their smaller numbers make it a challenge, we were convinced that the existing faculty group will continue to operate a program that works well and produces a steady stream of majors in addition to providing a large service component to the rest of the University.

However, further reductions to full time faculty numbers would seriously impair the program's ability to deliver courses and MA supervisions; it is now operating on the minimum number of full time faculty needed to maintain the coherence of the program. It already operates well through programs both at the undergraduate and graduate level and there are no obvious courses that could be removed without doing substantial damage to the intellectual coherence of the overall program.

The undergraduate program is comprehensive, historically grounded, and covers all the major systematic fields of contemporary philosophical research. The small but thematically focused MA program provides both excellent training for graduate students and provides key teaching assistants for the lower level courses. Given the success of some of the MA students in going on to be doctoral students, the one year program culminating in an MRP is providing a solid training in key philosophical skills.

There is a clearly expressed desire to increase diversity and improve the involvement of students in active learning and community outreach. Managed carefully, new experiential learning opportunities could also have benefits in raising the profile of the department both on campus and outside the university in ways that can simultaneously enhance student recruitment.

Overall, we found that the Department is serving the core mission and pillars of Wilfrid Laurier University. It has clearly articulated learning outcomes, its graduates are finding homes in MA and PhD. Programs, Law School, and paid employment. Existing resources are being used creatively to maintain program quality in difficult circumstances. Our recommendations try to build on the creative labour of the department and focus on ways of enhancing the Department's external profile with an eye to increasing enrollment and external funding.

Following receipt of the External Reviewers' Report, the Department collaborated on a Unit Response, which was submitted on February 2, 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

The External Reviewers' Report included 16 recommendations, which have been listed verbatim below, followed by a summary of the department's response, and the relevant decanal responses.

Recommendation #1: While we do not follow the previous reviewers in recommending a *reduction* in their history of philosophy courses, we do recommend that they undertake a systematic review of those offerings. Unless there are new hires, curriculum changes are going to have to be zero sum. If there are ways to still provide comprehensive coverage of the history of philosophy while reducing the total number of individual courses taught, space will be created for new courses. However, we believe that the details of curriculum have to be left to the department to decide.

Unit Response: The Department decided not to reduce its History of Philosophy offerings, citing changes to the policy around courses being added and deleted and alignment with the expertise of the department.

Decanal Response: The Department response notes that this recommendation is based on the assumption that if a new course is added then an existing course must be removed, so that retaining the number of history of philosophy courses precludes the Department's evolution of offerings. While the Department is correct to observe that this "zero sum" approach is not absolutely in place, the Dean of Arts would like to confirm that new course offerings should be based on a careful evaluation of the availability of instructors and costs of added stipends, so that a strategic approach to adding and removing courses needs to be adopted.

Recommendation #2: We applaud the Department's commitment to enhancing experiential learning, but we recommend that it explore ways to connect students to the community. That could mean getting students out of the classroom to work in various ways in the community, or it could mean finding ways to bring the community into the classroom. Again, the details are best left to the department, but some concrete suggestions include: sending undergraduate students to their high schools to talk about key social issues, include as a component of topical ethical and social and political classes outreach to the local community, including, as

appropriate, recent immigrants, marginalized populations, the elderly to participate in debates and discussions. Both approaches could also help advance the goal of diversifying the curriculum and the voices heard in the department. Social media can also be a tool of active learning. Some ideas here include a student run blog, creative use of twitter to disseminate the results of class discussions, and a student run Facebook pages that draws the public into philosophical debates.

Unit Response: The Department is interested in examining the various pre-existing models for increased experiential learning here; in particular, Community Service Learning. The Philosophy Curriculum Committee will liaise with FT instructors of these courses in order to determine if there is a suitable course for a CSL component. The department has no current plans to further its social media presence.

Decanal Response: When addressing this recommendation it will be necessary to take into account the provincial government's recent guidelines on the definition of experiential learning. The emphasis on skills development for careers narrows the possibilities of what will count towards the designation, so that, for example, the Reviewers' suggestion of sending students into high schools to discuss social issues would probably not count. Depending on placements, an effort towards increased Community Service Learning possibilities is more likely to result in "official" experiential learning recognition. This is not to say, however, that enhanced engaged learning opportunities, which do not focus on skills development, should be discounted. The Department's willingness to explore both experiential and engaged learning models is very positive.

The Dean of Arts concurs with the Department's decision not to further advance its social media presence.

Recommendation #3: We understand the Department's concern that introducing pre-requisites at the 200-level is negatively impacting service enrollment, but we recommend against precipitous judgment. Thus, we recommend that the current policy be maintained as a pilot project for 2-3 years. If enrolments do not increase and concern about numbers persists, then the pre-requisites could be removed and a 200-level course reserved for majors could be introduced (assuming room could be created in the curriculum for it). This move would address the concern that allowing everyone in to 200-level courses "waters down" the philosophical challenge for majors, while allowing the department to maintain the very high number of non-majors that it teaches.

Unit Response: The Department agreed with the reviewers that this initiative needed a few years to pilot and indicated that they would continue to monitor the results (enrollment, grade outcomes and course evaluations) closely, and revisit the decision after a few years.

Decanal Response: The Dean of Arts concurs that the introduction of pre-requisites to 200-level courses should continue so that sufficient information may be collected about its impact on the program.

Recommendation #4: We recommend that the department consider making the formal logic requirement a disjunctive requirement with the informal logic course, as it is now for double majors (see p. 24, Self-Study).

Unit Response: The Department remains committed to formal logic as a fundamental pillar of philosophical methodology, noting that graduate programs in Philosophy require competency in formal logic, and students

who enter into these programs with no background find themselves underprepared and often lagging behind their cohorts.

Decanal Response: The Department's recent move to teach formal logic in an Active Learning Classroom, and its commitment to making the topic as accessible as possible through innovative pedagogy, supports its decision to retain its current degree pattern.

Recommendation #5: We recommend that the current policy of course assignments with regard to 100-level courses be maintained. We recognize that full-time faculty should be the public face of the program, and that they are essential to recruitment. Since students do not pick their major until they are in their second year, full time faculty can still fulfil this role in the large 200-level classes they teach.

Unit Response: The Department agreed to maintain the current policy.

Decanal Response: The Dean of Arts concurs with the Department's acceptance of this recommendation.

Recommendation #6: We recommend that the Department re-think its on-line course offerings. They simply duplicate what is already offered in the classroom (and philosophy is best taught live and in person, in our view). There may be good reason for this duplication, but we did not hear it. In the absence of one, students taking the classes on line might be better served in the classroom.

Unit Response: The Department indicated that they are interested in discussing how the Faculty of Arts currently perceives the role of online learning at Laurier, and to refining the departmental policy accordingly.

Decanal Response: The Department should discuss its on-line offerings on a year-to-year basis with the Office of the Dean of Arts, in order to ensure sufficient enrollments are maintained, and that there is no unnecessary replication of in-class offerings.

Recommendation #7: We recommend that the Department consider eliminating one of three required 400-level seminars in favour of a capstone course that the graduating class would take together. This capstone could perhaps be combined with a senior thesis or other research project which would help give overall unity and shape to students' four years of philosophical study.

Unit Response: The department disagreed with this recommendation, reiterating that single honours students take a minimum of three 400-level courses, and combined honours students take a minimum of two. All 400-level classes are seminars, where student presentations, participation, and collaboration are standard features.

Decanal Response: The Department believes that its current 400-level seminar pattern provides an equivalent experience to the capstone course recommended by the Reviewers, and therefore it does not accept this recommendation. This seems a reasonable position for a unit of this size, so the Dean of Arts concurs with the Department's position.

A) Graduate

Recommendation #8: We recommend that the existing structure of the program be maintained and that the department not develop a 1 year, course only option. (p.9, Question 3, Self-Study).

Unit Response: The department agreed with the recommendation to maintain the current structure of the graduate program.

Decanal Response: The Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies would like to discuss this in more depth. Although it was one of the questions posed to the external committee in the self study document, it is not discussed in the external review. The external reviewers made their recommendation but never provided any context. It is difficult to evaluate what the costs and benefits would be without more information.

Recommendation #9: We recommend that the idea to create a public philosophy component (option three, p. 26, Self-Study) actively be pursued. Requiring all graduate students to attend, and write a reflective paper about, some issue of pressing public concern would be a unique form of experiential learning, demonstrate the public relevance of philosophy to the community, and serve as a valuable recruitment tool. Moreover, since the community is diverse, having students engage with and respond to community concerns should also help advance the goal of diversity.

Unit Response: The department indicated that it is debating several options for incorporating the spirit of this recommendation into existing courses, such as participation in the 3MT program.

Decanal Response: The Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies supports the increased participation in the 3MT program. It should be noted, that this recommendation goes far beyond graduate student participation in a forum like the 3MT. One aspect of this recommendation is focused on experiential learning and skill building as defined by the provincial government. The Unit response does not completely address this issue (See Dean of Arts response to Recommendation #2. A second aspect of this recommendation is to cultivate a much stronger relationship between the graduate program and issues in the broader community. The external reviewers comment that focusing on the hot-button issues in the community will “demonstrate the public relevance of philosophy to the community, and serve as a valuable recruitment tool.” This is not to say, however, that current and controversial issues are not being addressed by the current program structure. The Department’s willingness to explore several different options to meet this recommendation is a positive step.

Recommendation #10: We recommend that the Department, in consultation with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, explore ways to increase annual enrollment from 7-8 to 10-12 students. We make further recommendations below about ways that the funding package might be enhanced as an aid to recruitment.

Unit Response: The department agreed to consult with FGPS on ways to increase enrolment in the graduate program, citing funding as the obstacle to this.

Decanal Response: The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies is a shared service under the RCM model. Any additional funding for graduate students will need to be coordinated with the Dean of Arts. FGPS may be

able to play a support role by collaborating on outreach and recruiting efforts (see response to recommendation 9 as well as recommendation 11).

Recommendation #11: We recommend that the Department advertise its MA more aggressively to students at other Canadian and American schools. This campaign should be developed in conjunction with our recommendations above regarding web-site design, alumni outreach, and external funding applications.

Unit Response: The department agreed with this recommendation and outlined several initiatives already in place to promote the graduate program, as well as outlined plans to work with FGPS on further marketing opportunities.

Decanal Response: FGPS welcomes the opportunity to work closely with the program to identify marketing opportunities aimed at increasing recruitment from outside of Laurier.

B) General

Recommendation #12: Given the serious and significant decline in the numbers of tenured faculty, we recommend that at least one new full time, tenure-track position be given to the department.

Unit Response: The department agreed and acknowledged that this recommendation falls outside the remit of the cyclical review.

Decanal Response: This recommendation entails resource allocations that cannot be addressed outside of the wider budgetary restraints of the Faculty of Arts, and of the university as a whole. It is therefore not included in the prioritization list, since it may not be implemented outside of the budget allocation process. The Dean of Arts is pleased to note that the Department acknowledges that this recommendation is outside the purview of the cyclical review.

Recommendation #13: We recommend that tenured faculty work with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, the Office of Research Services, and their own colleagues who have been successful winning awards from granting agencies, to develop a systematic plan for increasing application rates. Increases in external funding will generate a new pool of resources for the department, some of which could be used to fund research assistantships. In turn, these assistantships can be used as a recruitment tool for Graduate students and another way of developing experiential learning opportunities for graduate and (perhaps) senior undergraduate students.

Unit Response: The department agreed to discuss this matter at its next retreat and to seek leadership from those who have already had success securing external funding.

Decanal Response: The Dean of Arts endorses the Reviewers' suggestion that the Department approach the Office of Research Services for guidance in applying for external research funding.

The Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies notes that there has been almost no RA money available to support students over the past eight years. Moreover, very few philosophy students have received studentships as part of their funding package. The FGPS concurs that the Office of Research Services will be able to provide the best guidance for faculty. Perhaps the program can also explore strategies to incorporate grant writing in its graduate courses.

Recommendation #14: We recommend that the University ensure that Contract Academic Staff have office space for their exclusive use, and that Graduate Students have sufficient space for study, informal conversation, and their assistantship duties. We further recommend that the senior administrative assistant for the Department have an office adjacent to the office of the head, both for the sake of efficiency and departmental cohesion.

Unit Response: The department agreed with the reviewers but noted that this recommendation falls outside of the remit of the cyclical review.

Decanal Response: This recommendation entails resource allocations that cannot be addressed outside of the wider space planning considerations of the Faculty of Arts, and of the university as a whole. It is therefore not included in the prioritization list, since it may not be implemented outside of the space allocation process. The Dean of Arts is pleased to note that the Department acknowledges that this recommendation is outside the purview of the cyclical review.

Recommendation #15: We recommend that the Department develop an internal plan for the development of the website as a tool of community outreach and recruitment. Specifically, the website could highlight the achievements of undergraduate and graduate alumni (thus also helping build stronger links with them), provide up to date announcements about departmental initiatives and events of interest to the Laurier and civic communities, and highlight the achievements of faculty and (especially) students.

Unit Response: The department agreed with this recommendation and outlined progress that had already been made toward its implementation.

Decanal Response: The Department's acceptance of this recommendation to enhance its website, in order to raise its profile, is a very positive development. A program's web presence is central to raising the profile of the program's faculty and reaching potential graduate students outside Laurier. Having faculty and students profiled on the main Laurier webpage is something that may drive traffic to the program website.

Recommendation #16: In response to a concern expressed to us by the faculty, we recommend that the University re-think its move of Student Evaluations of Teaching from in-class to on-line. On-line response rates are significantly lower, so much so that the statistical significance of the surveys could be compromised. This problem is especially significant for Contract Academic Staff, who have few other means of proving their teaching abilities.

Unit Response: The department acknowledged that this was a university-level rather than department-level decision, noting that it appreciated the sentiments behind the recommendation.

Decanal Response: The Dean of Arts recognizes the legitimacy of the issue raised, but also notes that the move to electronic course evaluations is in the very early stages of its implementation, and therefore the statistics on response rates at Laurier are not sufficiently comprehensive to warrant a recommendation to return to in-class evaluations.

STRENGTHS OF THE PROGRAM(S)

1. The Department supports all three pillars of the Strategic Academic Plan
2. Students are fully satisfied with the quality of education they are receiving
3. The Full-time Faculty, Contract Academic Staff, and Support Staff have collegial relationships and are fully committed to delivering the best possible educational experience for the students.
4. There is a good balance between service courses and courses intended for Majors.
5. The Department has found creative ways to introduce diversity into its curriculum.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

1. The Department could expand its offerings in Experiential/Engaged Learning.
2. The Department could develop a plan and be more strategic in its applications for external research funding.

SIGNATURES

| | Date | Signature |
|------------------------|----------------|---|
| Dr. Richard Nemesvari | April 20, 2018 |  |
| Dr. Douglas Deutschman | May 25, 2018 |  |
| Dr. Kathryn Carter | May 30, 2018 |  |
| Dr. Paul Jessop | June 27, 2018 |  |

Approved by Program Review Sub-Committee: September 13, 2018

Approved by Senate Academic Planning Committee: October 4, 2018

Submitted to Senate (for information): May 22, 2019

Implementation Report Due Date: May 22, 2021

RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZED FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLAN

| Recommendation ¹ to be Implemented | Responsibility for Implementation | Anticipated Completion Date | Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable) | Additional Notes |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Recommendation #2: Experiential Learning | Department | September 2019 | | |
| Recommendation #3: Pre-requisites | Department | September 2020 | | Two more years of retaining these prerequisites should provide sufficient information for the Department to make a decision. |
| Recommendation #6: Online course strategy | Department | September 2019 | | |
| Recommendation #8: Maintain graduate program structure | Department | September 2019 | | |
| Recommendation #9: Public Philosophy component in graduate program | Department | September 2020 | | |
| Recommendation #10: Increase graduate program enrolment | Department | September 2020 | Dean of Arts | |

¹Recommendations have been abbreviated in the Implementation Plan due to length. For the full recommendation, please see above in the “Recommendations and Responses” section of the report.

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|---|------------|----------------|---------------------------|--|
| Recommendation #11: Advertising of graduate program | Department | September 2019 | With assistance from FGPS | |
| Recommendation #13: Work with Office of Research Services on external funding opportunities | Department | September 2019 | | |
| Recommendation #15: Develop stronger web presence for programs | Department | January 2020 | | |