

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
College of Arts and Sciences

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM
Department of Philosophy

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS
Dr. Mary Jeanne Larrabee, DePaul University
Dr. Elizabeth Murray, Loyola Marymount University
Dr. Saul Traiger, Occidental College

CAMPUS VISIT
February 5-7, 2014

The review team read the self-study written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; conducted class visits; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Deans and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the department's self-study and other university materials.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.

The external reviewers rated the Philosophy Department as EXCELLENT. They stated that the Department "is significantly above the level one would expect to find at a top-tier liberal arts college or university. The quality of the program would be readily recognizable by disciplinary experts in the field who are external to the institution." There is "clear alignment of the department mission with the University's mission, values, and strategic priorities" and the curriculum "surpasses what one would expect to find at comparable universities and even at top-tier universities...The breadth and depth of expertise evident in the Department could serve as a model for other high quality institutions." The reviewers suggested improvements in a couple of areas, including the need for additional faculty and some minor changes to the curriculum, assessment strategy, and outreach to prospective students.

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

- The Department faculty received high praise for their teaching, research, and service. The reviewers stated that the Department is "excellent in almost every way."
- The reviewers stated that the "collegiality in the Department is a key factor in its success, both in its teaching excellence and its strong record of scholarly achievement."
- The Department has an excellent governance structure and has worked hard to develop a comprehensive, clear assessment plan and quality advising.
- The curriculum "provides undergraduate students philosophical foundations within the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, and develops in the students the knowledge and skills in

analytic and critical thinking needed in all areas of life” and “is outstanding in terms of its breadth, diversity, social consciousness and academic rigor”.

- “The Department has an excellent record of attracting and retaining stellar young philosophers, and of incorporating them into the unique plural synthesis that is the USF Philosophy Department.”
- The Department “is ahead of the curve in current trends in Philosophy focusing on issues of race and gender, moral and political thought, and ethnic studies, including African American Philosophy, Asian American Philosophy, and Latin American Philosophy.”
- The reviewers noted that while the Department’s ethnic and racial diversity is excellent, its gender diversity is not.”
- The Department needs two hires to bring them back to staffing levels in 2006, the year of their last academic program review.
- The Department should reduce its reliance on part-time faculty.
- The number of majors should be higher, but the Department “should be commended on the measures it is already taking to attract majors.”
- The St. Ignatius Institute’s “great books” model has reduced the number of philosophy courses in the SII curriculum. The reviewers commented that the faculty would welcome working with the new director.

3. What specific recommendations for improving the program’s quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?

The review team made the following specific recommendations:

Faculty and Staff

- Hire full-time faculty in the areas of analytic epistemology and metaphysics.
- Consider hiring faculty in the history of philosophy, specifically in the area of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.
- Stabilize the existing term position as a continuing term position with a multi-year renewable contract.
- Improve working conditions for adjunct faculty in the Philosophy Department.
- Expand student worker funds to allow a graduate-level student to assist the Program Assistant with the complicated and time-sensitive work connected with the Fleishhacker Fund.

Curriculum, Majors, and Student Experience

- Increase the number of majors.
- Open the upper-division major courses to non-majors, but enforce prerequisites so that the courses are not diluted.
- Add a capstone course or redesign the Honors/Senior Thesis to make it more accessible and attractive to majors. The reviewers provided specific suggestions regarding revising the Honors Thesis experience.
- Reduce the cap for the Core courses to numbers comparable to comparator Jesuit institutions.
- Distribute an “official publication” from the Department that includes information about

new courses and alumni accomplishments, in addition to the current student newsletter.

- Development minor programs geared toward other majors.
- Provide the student club with a faculty mentor.

Advising

- Develop an assessment strategy for advisement.
- Appoint or elect a Graduate School Advisor for students interested in considering graduate school in philosophy or host a couple of well-advertised group meetings to discuss graduate school options.

Space

- Co-locate the entire Department, including adjuncts, in a suitable space with a common area and adequate shared office space for adjuncts.
- The Program Assistant's working conditions are less than optimal. The reviewers recommended rethinking of the appropriate space for a philosophy reception and mailbox area.
- The lack of a Departmental seminar room makes it difficult to arrange space for "the robust and frequent colloquia series."
- The reviewers stated that the "largest concern is with the lack of space for adjuncts in the Philosophy Department. We see addressing this concern as pressing."

Other Resources

- The library research resources are inadequate. Consider appointing a departmental liaison or create a library committee.
- The reviewers recommended that the Department and the Dean work with the University's Development Office to develop a plan for identifying possible donors.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee is the program following the University's strategic initiative in that it is;

a. Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars.

The review team stated that the "Department's faculty is exemplary and distinctive in its diversity and plurality of philosophical approaches, traditions and methodologies" and the "Department is exemplary and distinctive as a diverse and pluralistic Department, embracing a wide range of philosophical methods and traditions." The faculty are recognized national and international scholars. The reviewers repeatedly stated that the faculty members are also excellent and dedicated teachers that have developed a curriculum that is "current" and "cutting-edge." The reviewers agree with the Department that it "is among the most ethnically diverse philosophy departments of its size in the United States." The Department, however, needs to address the gender imbalance, especially given the University's large female student population.

- b. *Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement, strong leadership capabilities, a concern for others, and a sense of responsibility for the weak and vulnerable.*

The reviewers stated that the “Department attracts diverse students from the entire university to its diverse array of rigorous courses” and “significantly impacts the intellectual and moral lives of the students at USF through its role in the Core and through its generous involvement in interdisciplinary, university-wide programs.” Furthermore, the “significant number of students move to post-baccalaureate programs indicates that they are prepared quite satisfactorily in the discipline.” However, the reviewers agree with the Department that the “numbers of underrepresented groups among students could still be enhanced.”

- c. *Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.*

The reviewers stated that the “Department’s commitment to academic excellence is clear in its formulation of learning outcomes for all the general education courses and for its major as a whole. These are communicated in each syllabus and tested through a regular assessment program.” They commented throughout the report about the high quality learning environment. The reviewers stated that the “goals reflect the values at the heart of the discipline of Philosophy--the search for truth through self-reflection and critical thinking, and the pursuit of justice” and the “Department offers students the opportunity to become actively engaged in critical social and political issues through a variety of ethics courses, electives, and engaged learning courses. The Department provides opportunities for students to learn concretely about social justice issues.”

5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?

The reviewers found that the “Philosophy Department’s mission is clearly aligned with the University’s mission and strategic priorities, since it provides undergraduates opportunities to be educated within the Jesuit, Catholic tradition in its philosophical foundations, offers undergraduate students much of the knowledge and skills required for analytic and critical thinking needed in all areas of life, and teaches courses that address the deeper questions about life and its ethical dimensions to help them develop their sense of values and a sensitivity to be women and men for others.” The team emphasized that this alignment can be seen even more clearly when discussing the Core Values. The Philosophy Department’s curriculum and activities are examples of “viewing faith and reason as complementary,” “the freedom and the responsibility to pursue truth and follow evidence to its conclusion,” “learning as a humanizing, social activity rather than a competitive exercise,” “a common good that transcends the interests of particular individuals or groups”, “reasoned discourse rather than coercion as the norm for decision making, “a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and traditions as essential components of a quality education in our global context” as well as other values.

- 6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee's recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?**

The next step is for the Dean and Associate Deans to meet with the Department and discuss the action plan based on the self-study and reviewers' report. Based on the reviewers' suggestions, the Office of the Provost could assist the program by providing support for: 1) new faculty hires; 2) additional space, especially for adjunct faculty; 3) minor curriculum changes; 4) additional assessment activities; 5) library research resources; 6) working with the Development Office.

- 7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?**