

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
Philosophy

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

Karen J. Warren, Professor, Macalester College
Mark Murphy, Professor, Georgetown University
Margaret Walker, Professor, Arizona State University
(Professor Walker withdrew due to illness)

CAMPUS VISIT:
April 5-7, 2006

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 Dean 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 review team said that the USF Philosophy Department was, in many ways, a "stellar, creative, unique, innovative Philosophy program solidly within the Jesuit, Catholic faith and intellectual tradition, that deserves to be recognized for its excellence in the areas of diversity and innovative curriculum that accommodate the traditional and the newer, non-traditional conceptions of philosophy." While not specifically comparing the department to top-tier liberal arts colleges and universities, the implication is that they rated the department and its programs as VERY GOOD/EXCELLENT.

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

- The reviewers noted that the department was a "gem". It had made a "distinctive, clear and compelling contribution" to USF in that it emphasized a "unique diversity" and a commitment to "conflicted pluralism", that is the development and maintenance of a philosophy based in both the traditional and the novel even when the latter is in conflict with the former.
- The review team also argued that the department as a whole deserves credit "for their contributions to the department's harmonious functioning and deep,

abiding commitments to diversity and social justice". Each department member has demonstrated an individual willingness to "invest time, energy, philosophical acuity and patience" for the greater good. Indeed, they argued that the department should make its experiences known to the broader philosophical profession.

- However, the reviewers argued that the department carries a disproportionate share of the Core requirement in Ethics compared to the Theology Department. Together with their commitment to teaching courses for CORE Area D-1 (Philosophy), this means the Philosophy faculty are stretched too thin in terms of their teaching responsibilities.
- Stemming from this issue, the review team were concerned with the department's over reliance on adjunct faculty who were somewhat mixed in terms of teaching quality.
- The review team were concerned with department's advising system.
- While this was an excellent program, the review team did offer some constructive suggestions for improvement.

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

a) CORE Curriculum

- The reviewers noted that while on paper Philosophy and Theology share responsibility for CORE Area D-3 (Ethics), in practice the workload is carried by Philosophy. In Spring 2006, for example, the department offered twenty sections in this area while Theology offered three. This increases the department's reliance on adjunct and part-time faculty.
- The reviewers argued that "equity and fairness require that either more Theology faculty teach D-3 courses...or that other solutions...be found to alleviate the burden on the Philosophy Department."

b) Adjunct Teaching

- The reviewers were concerned with the department's over reliance on adjunct faculty "many of whom have no allegiance to USF or to the Philosophy Department" and its culture.
- Furthermore, adjunct faculty have a mixed record in terms of teaching quality with some "significantly below the standards of acceptability".
- The reviewers argue that the "number of adjunct faculty must be decreased". The University should "seriously consider dramatically reducing the pool of adjunct faculty", terminating those with poor evaluations while making special efforts to keep those with excellent evaluations and a strong commitment to the institution.

c) Faculty Hiring

- The review team recommended that, given its workload, the department “does not have sufficient full time faculty”. The hiring of at least one full-time, tenure track faculty member is therefore “essential”.
- The reviewers strongly recommended that the new hire be a woman “or minimally, that hiring a woman should be a high priority in all departmental searches in the future”.

c) Advising

- After talking with students, the review team were concerned with “the absence of dependable advising, or, in many cases, any advising at all.” They noted that students referred to a “lack of clarity” in the philosophy curriculum with regard to which classes to take and in what order or sequence.
- They urged the department to “institute a more reliable, consistent, informative advising system”, particularly in terms of offering a more sequential ordering of the classes that students should take during their academic careers and in offering more advice on graduate school.
- Some students expressed a concern that there may be too many elective classes on offer. This made it difficult to know what to take and there was some uncertainty as to whether these classes would meet minimal enrollment standards.
- The review team also recommended that the department follow up on the issue of the foundation and viability of a Philosophy Club for majors and minors.
- Finally, the reviewers urged the department to make better use of the money allocated for “student employees”.

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 noted “a sincere, genuine, collegial, cooperative, good faith commitment to the value of diversity and a refusal to permit the erasure of difference” among the faculty.
- 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 students whom the reviewers met “really liked philosophy, the philosophy courses they took, and the professors they knew”. The faculty were committed “to teaching both traditional philosophical perspectives and newer challenges to those perspectives.”
- c. Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.
 - The reviewers noted that the Philosophy Department was excellent “in achieving, perhaps uniquely, the mission and goals of a genuinely diverse

community within a Jesuit, Catholic learning environment committed to social justice and responsibility”.

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 felt that the department had created a philosophy program within the Jesuit, Catholic intellectual tradition that did “not reduce philosophy to some neat, tidy, monistic theory.”
- They went on to say that “neither reviewer has ever seen anything quite like it before and we suspect we might have wondered beforehand whether such genuine acceptance – indeed embracement and promotion – of diversity among such different colleagues, curricular offerings and philosophical perspectives were possible”

6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee’s recommendations for program improvement? What can the AVP’s office do to appropriately respond to the review?

- Support the department with another full-time tenure track faculty member.
- Support the department’s attempts to improve the coherence and structuring of the curriculum.
- Assist with the department’s efforts to reorganize academic advising.
- Help reduce the department’s reliance on adjunct and part-time faculty.

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

- The reviewers stressed that their report was a “highly positive, affirming and laudatory perspective on the contributions, strengths and unique qualities of the Philosophy Department” and they hoped their recommendations would help the department improve in particular areas.