UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO | **College of Arts and Sciences**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review, College of Arts & Sciences

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

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CAMPUS VISIT
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Draft reviewed and approved by: Faculty of the Philosophy Department and the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences

The review team read the self study written by faculty in the Philosophy Department, reviewed the curriculum and course syllabi; 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 Mission and Values, 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 gave the Department a rating of VERY GOOD, noting "the potential to be excellent with appropriate staffing support for curricular and programmatic development that further connects the philosophy curriculum to the growing areas of strength at the University and to broader San Francisco communities." The reviewers drew connections between the Jesuit, Catholic intellectual tradition and the discipline of philosophy, which "cultivates students' capacities for critical and reflective engagement with one another." They stated that "the philosophy department at USF has successfully upheld that venerable tradition by providing an intellectually engaging major and minor, offering excellent core-courses, and fostering a reflective community amongst faculty and students. Consonant with the University's mission, the Department offers impressive diverse courses to educate persons for others."

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

The most important general issues in the Department relate to the Core curriculum and staffing within the program. The Philosophy Department delivers their curriculum to majors and minors, and also manages Core D1 and the majority of Core D3 offerings for all undergraduate students at USF. The small size of the full-time faculty, and the turnover in the Program Assistant role, has created challenges for the Department; recommendations from the report are explored in greater detail in the next section.

Related to faculty hiring, the external reviewers offered some suggestions for strategic hiring and recommended that the faculty in the Department make the final decision on the direction of hiring together, "informed by everyone's understanding of the institution." The reviewers suggested exploring new faculty with expertise in Latin American Philosophy (given the "considerable increase in the number of Latinx students in the program") and/or the Philosophy of Science (in particular, they suggest "a new hire in Philosophy of Cognitive Sciences/Psychology," who could assist with courses in the philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, and epistemology, and also contribute to "psychology or neuroscience curricula"). They also made the suggestion of searching for faculty with expertise "around philosophy and ethics in/of technology" in light of USF's recent growth in STEM fields.

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

The review team discussed the findings of the review in six areas: "(1) the program's contribution to the mission, vision, and values of the University; (2) the quality of the program curriculum, faculty, and students; (3) the program's current resources and sustainability; (4) the quality of program administration; (5) present and projected student demand for the program of study; (6) the Department's plan for the next three to five years." Recommendations for improvement were offered in three of the six areas and are listed below.

(2) Quality of the program curriculum, faculty, and students:
- (Core Curriculum) The review team highlighted concerns around the ability of full-time faculty to deliver Core D1 and D3 classes to all undergraduate students university-wide. "The Department with only 10 full time faculty serves the students population of 5882," the reviewers wrote, "for comparison, the Philosophy Department at Loyola Marymount University with 17 tenure track faculty and 7 full-time faculty (visiting assistant professors, clinical professors, and post doctor teaching fellows) offers philosophy core courses for 6673 students. The quick ratio between students and [full-time] faculty at USF is 588.2:1 while LMU is 278:1."
- (Philosophy Major, Minor Curriculum) The reviewers recommended the faculty in the Department revisit the major and minor curriculum to ensure that "the required courses reflect both a shared vision of philosophical education and the contributions made by all members of the faculty." They provided resources for the Department to think about the curriculum in regards to "the relationship between the core and the major/minor requirements," "the possibility of introducing a "Being and Knowing" requirement that covers contemporary philosophical questions in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and

philosophy of science," and "the possibility of introducing a "Non-Western philosophy" requirement."

(3) Current resources and sustainability:
- The review team recommended hiring additional faculty members in the immediate future due to the "top-heavy" nature of faculty rank in the Department "with only one assistant professor (term) and only three associate professors". They wrote, "a more even distribution of faculty across these ranks is more sustainable, and junior faculty bring not only new disciplinary competency, but new perspectives, leadership and administrative strengths, and connections to the philosophical community. Although the high number of full professors indicates that faculty have been able to smoothly move through the ranks, looking to the future, the junior faculty will have a heavy burden maintaining a viable department without a plan for intentional hiring over the near and medium term." The review team also encouraged the Department to explore opportunities for new faculty "through the Gerardo Marin Dissertation (or Post-doctoral) Fellowship program and to consider interdisciplinary collaborations as a mechanism for expanding the depth of the philosophy curriculum and full-time faculty."
- The reviewers also recommend more clarity around "workload and departmental service expectations" for term faculty in the Department.

(4) Program administration:
- The reviewers expressed a strong need for a consistent and reliable Program Assistant given "the incredibly high rate of turnover of professional staff" and the issues this creates within the Department. The review team recommended that "the Dean's Office [help] facilitate additional appropriate support" in the future.
- They also identified concerns around staff workspaces in the Department, reporting that the student assistant in the Department does not currently have a workstation and instead shares a desk with the Program Assistant. "The student worker should have a designated workspace, so that the PA can, themselves, have a private workspace appropriate for elements of their job that are private and confidential."

4. **In the opinion of the external review committee, is the program following the University's strategic initiatives?**

The external review team discussed the successes of the Department's alignment with USF's Mission and Values and the 2027 Strategic Plan, specifically "Goal 1: Reimagine Jesuit Education," that aims to "revise the undergraduate core, majors, and graduate curriculum," and "strengthen curricular and co-curricular programming in order to develop students as ethical leaders, change agents, and movement builders."

With the Core curriculum, the Department "has developed and executed a vision for these requirements that make both philosophy and ethics relevant to the broad range of majors, pursuits, and eventual careers of all students. This is evidenced most strongly by the range of courses the Department offers that satisfy these requirements and the importance faculty place on teaching them well." The reviewers offered a

comparison to Boston College, which maintains six philosophy courses that fulfill their general education requirement, and Loyola Marymount University, which offers only one such course for their philosophy core requirement; USF's Philosophy Department "offers at least 36 courses that satisfy the relevant core requirements, that represent a far richer and deeper range of philosophical questions. This wide range of courses not only better reflects what philosophy is, it is capable of better meeting the students where they are because it is relevant to their widespread interests and diverse identities and experiences."

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?**

As described above, the external reviewers' report speaks highly of the "award-winning faculty" and the strengths of the Philosophy students. "The Department is characterized by collegiality and commitment to the common good of the university community," with faculty who are "committed educators. Student development is clearly a central and shared value of the full-time faculty, and they encourage and support part-time faculty in sharing this commitment. Their dedication to their students and to philosophy is matched by their dedication to the USF community."

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, Associate Dean, and Associate Director of Assessment to meet with the faculty of the Department of Philosophy 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: inviting co-creation and recommending participation from Philosophy Department faculty in conversation and task forces regarding strategic planning, Core Curriculum revision, and interdisciplinary programming and other innovative endeavors; and thinking creatively about faculty and staff support and hiring.

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

No additional information is necessary to understand the report.