

PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT
PHILOSOPHY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LETTERS
FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY
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PROGRAM REVIEW TEAM

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I. INTRODUCTION

This program review report (PRT) provides a synthesis of a three-day visit (2/5/2019-2/7/19) with Florida Atlantic leadership at the University (R. Ivy; K. Scarpinato, E. Pratt) and College (B. Barrios; M Horswell) level. In addition, the report incorporates information gathered during meetings with faculty (M. Banchetti, S. Glynn, C. Headley, L. Guilmette, C. Gould) and students in the Department of Philosophy and a tour of the facilities.

II. OVERVIEW

The department of philosophy at the Florida Atlantic University offers a BA in philosophy as well as a Philosophy of law track and several minors. They contribute to the general education program and to a number of interdisciplinary programs by providing high quality instruction. They currently have five tenure-track faculty and are searching for an endowed Chair. They also have two visiting assistant positions and an adjunct.

The department describes its values in the self-study as: *fostering critical thinking and sound argumentation, depth and clarity of thought, of analysis and synthesis of ideas, and of excellence in teaching and research.* These values allow them to carry out their mission in supporting the teaching and research goals of Florida Atlantic University.

The review team was charged with identifying strengths and weaknesses, challenges and opportunities.

III. CLIMATE/COLLEGIALITY

The last external review of the philosophy program occurred during the 2012 academic year while the department was still in receivership. At that time, because of internal conflicts and strife among the faculty, an Acting Chair was appointed from the anthropology department. Professor Michael Harris served as the chair of the anthropology department and, at the same time, as the acting chair of philosophy. The 2012 review made a number of recommendations. Most important among these were the appointment of a permanent chair hired from outside FAU through a competitive process and the development of a strategic plan, which would tie the many facets of the department's mission and values to the pillars and platforms of the FAU Board of Trustees and the University's strategic plan. The department came out of receivership in November 2017 and a chair was appointed from within the core faculty of the department with unanimous support of the department faculty. Based on our interviews with individual faculty, the departmental faculty as a group, and the undergraduate students majoring in philosophy, it is clear that the faculty have turned the corner, healed their personal relationships with each other, and are ready and eager to rebuild the department as per the strategic plan and the recommendations of this external review.

IV. RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY AND VISIBILITY

Based on the self-study report, the department claims that their research productivity has remained consistently high throughout the academic years from 2014-2015 to 2016-2017. Given the relatively small number of faculty in the department and their substantial teaching and service loads (see next section), the committee agrees that the research productivity shown in Figure 15 of the self-study is quite impressive and worthy of recognition. Throughout our

meetings with the faculty and students, there was a recurring theme with respect to the research productivity of the department. The small number of full-time faculty in the department necessarily means that each member is required to engage in a high level of service. This substantial commitment to service is illustrated in Figure 17 of the self-study report. For example, during the 2016-2017 academic year, the faculty of the department served on 16 department, College, or University committee, which amounts to an average of three committees per faculty member in that year. In addition to this, the faculty served as members of 7 community or professional committees and as editors or referees for a total of 4 professional publications. This high demand for service activities from each member coupled with the 3-2 teaching load, which is the policy across all departments in the College of Arts and Letters, results in a significant lack of time devoted to research and scholarly work for each faculty member. This was noted by several faculty in the department and needs to be addressed. As more faculty are hired into the department, the demands for committee work on each member will presumably decrease allowing more time for research. However, it would be helpful if the opportunities for course-reductions and buyouts could be increased college-wide so that all of the faculty could benefit from a possible reduction of their college-imposed 3-2 teaching loads.

With respect to the visibility of the department, two decades ago, the B.A. program in philosophy was considered one of the strongest undergraduate philosophy programs in the Florida State University System (SUS), providing solid foundational training in philosophy as preparation for advanced graduate work, law school, theological seminary, and other careers. It was also known nationally and internationally for its strengths in continental philosophy, in particular Husserl. The former endowed Chair, Lester Embree, would often fund conferences that would bring scholars from all over the world and this enhanced the visibility of the department and its faculty, some of whom also work in Continental philosophy.

However, the loss of faculty over the last decade or so has made it difficult for the department to sustain their commitment to serving the lower-division Intellectual Foundations Program (IFP) and to providing their majors with a strong and solid foundation in philosophy. The teaching load for the Philosophy department is 3-2 and the committee feels this is a standard teaching load for departments without graduate programs. But because of their small numbers, the faculty are often teaching 4-5 distinct courses a year rather than teaching multiple sections of the same course. As noted above, their service load is also extremely heavy as the duties are distributed among a smaller number of faculty. Compared to other departments with comparable programs in the FSUS they are doing more with less.

According to the self-study their academic year headcount of Philosophy Majors is 67. Although this number may seem small compared to other departments, it is a fairly robust number for Philosophy. As the self-study notes and as national trends indicate, Humanities majors, in general, have seen a decline over the past 10 years. There is some indication, however, that this trend will change as more and more industries recognize the need for students with analytic and critical thinking skills and the department is already engaged in initiatives to build its majors and minors. Compared to other Florida SUS Philosophy departments their numbers are very good. With the exception of FIU, the other philosophy programs that offer only the baccalaureate degree have a much lower 2017 headcount than the program at FAU, and yet they have considerably more tenure-track lines.

The lack of tenure track faculty lines has also made it difficult for the remaining faculty to pursue their research and maintain their national and international reputation in the field. Our conversations with the faculty revealed that many of them have chosen not to pursue sabbaticals and research opportunities because they aren't sure who will be able to replace their teaching in the curriculum and they don't want to burden the remaining faculty with more service work. All of the tenure track faculty teach in the summer as well in order to make sure they are able to serve students and in order to augment salaries that are below the national average. This also contributes to the inability of faculty to pursue their research.

One of the department's main goals is to rebuild their program so that they can regain and maintain their former stature as one of the best undergraduate philosophy programs in the Florida SUS. One essential component of attaining this goal is to increase the size of the tenure-track faculty in the department. This issue of faculty hiring and recruitment is further addressed in the following section.

V. HIRES

The department argues in the self-study that they are seriously understaffed and we very much concur with this judgment. There are currently only five, and, with upcoming departures, there will soon only be four tenured and tenure-track faculty housed in the department. In our judgment seven is really the minimum number of tenured and tenure-track faculty needed to sustain the department's mission and contribute properly to the college and university. An additional two instructors would allow the department to serve the general education program (and, perhaps, expand their online offerings of general education) and relieve some of the need for faculty to teach four or five distinct course each year. It would also help to staff research buyouts if applications for the limited opportunities are successful.

There is currently a search underway for an endowed position. We have very serious reservations about the strategy of re-staffing the department with an endowed chair, though we understand that constraints set by endowment agreements may make the strategy unavoidable. If it were possible, we think the department would be far better served by hiring 3 new beginning tenure-track assistant professors than by hiring one senior faculty member to an endowed chair and one new junior professor.

We feel that the search for an endowed position currently underway is problematic in a number of ways. The salary and research budget for the position does not make it competitive relative to other endowed positions nationally. Endowed positions are normally in departments with graduate programs and they typically come with considerably reduced teaching loads and service expectations; while these are key to making the positions attractive to candidates, they are exactly what the department at FAU doesn't need given its critically low current staffing levels. And with a limited pool and the kind of candidates who might be attracted to endowed positions, there is a risk of bringing in someone who would not contribute positively to the departmental climate.

By contrast, the market for beginning tenure-track assistant professors in philosophy is very much a buyer's market. There are many superbly qualified junior candidates eager to land

tenure-track positions. Hiring at this level, the department could very reasonably hope to attract a large pool of excellent candidates who would be eager to make a full contribution to the department's teaching and service missions and who, given the intensely competitive nature of the post-2008 job market, would also be highly productive researchers.

We think the department is moving in the right directions in terms of areas in which to search that would fit well with the university's research pillars. One important such area is ethics, including biomedical and environmental ethics. Another is the philosophy of mind and neuroscience.

VI. CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ENROLLMENT

The committee was very impressed with the innovative programs the faculty have developed including the STEM minor and the critical thinking summer program and with the quality of instruction and the number of majors. It is our opinion that the department is already doing an excellent job of aligning itself with the University's teaching and research mission.

However, we recommend that the department consider some changes to the curriculum. We see no reason for concern about the content and level of the courses being taught; we are impressed with the rigor of the courses and the caliber of the department's majors. But the current major requirements are unusual within the discipline in a couple of ways which may be an impediment to the recruitment and retention of majors particularly given the emphasis the state performance metrics put on the four-year graduation rate.

First, we recommend that the department consider counting Introduction to Philosophy towards the requirements of the Philosophy major. Second, we recommend that the department consider reducing the number of required courses and thereby increasing the flexibility of the curriculum. It may be helpful to compare the philosophy major requirements at FAU with those at Florida State and the University of Florida. The FAU philosophy major requires 32 credit hours in philosophy, of which 27 hours are in 9 specific prescribed courses. By contrast, Florida State prescribes only 3 specific courses and 2 other courses from broader menus of options in the total requirement of 10 courses or 30 hours. The University of Florida requires only four specific courses or 12 hours of specific courses, with one further requirement to take a course from a menu of 2 options.

We think a more flexible curriculum more like the curriculum at the University of Florida or FSU would make it easier for majors to complete degree requirements in a timely fashion given that they often will not have decided to be philosophy majors when they first entered college, that they may want to double major, and that they may have work or other commitments that restrict the times at which they are able to take courses.

We also think the increased flexibility could be a help to the Department Chair in allowing for some workload flexibility for faculty wanting to complete research projects without negatively impacting student success.

Third, we recommend that the department consider reducing the number of hours required for the major from 32 to 30 - the same number as at FSU. This change would, again, make it easier for students to complete the major on time and to double major.

We are concerned more generally about the impact of the performance metrics on philosophy and other humanities disciplines in that the pressure to graduate in four years leads to students being discouraged from double-majoring. At other institutions, many philosophy majors are double majors. Students often benefit from pairing the general skills they learn in philosophy with other more straightforwardly vocationally relevant skills learned in other disciplines.

The other issue with respect to the curriculum that came up in a number of our conversations with department faculty was the use of non-philosophy graduate students as TAs in large sections of Introduction to Philosophy. This is clearly not at all an ideal situation. At other institutions, TAs are normally philosophy graduate students who are competent to grade introductory undergraduate work for both philosophical content and writing. The current model will be more effective if serious and uniform training programs for the TAs are introduced. Still, especially after our conversation with Dean Horswell, we wonder whether other models might be preferable. One possibility might be to eliminate the discussion sections and to employ senior undergraduate philosophy majors as graders. They would be liable to be considerably better able to grade introductory work for philosophical content as well as writing than are MA students from other disciplines with little philosophy background. And the opportunity to serve as graders might be very attractive and professionally helpful to senior undergraduates.

In its discussion of the curriculum, the self-study points out that the department is working to resist ‘fads’ or ‘trends’ in education that might distract them from providing students with a solid foundation in philosophy, chief among these being the move toward distance learning. At least two of the faculty, however, has been developing online versions of courses to great success. We would encourage the department to continue in this endeavor as online education is here to stay and provides access to education to people who otherwise would not have the opportunity (working mothers, disabled students, those in the military, etc.). There are also other developments in the education landscape, such as flipped classrooms/team-based learning/peer instruction/interactive techniques, that the faculty in the department might want to consider to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching. Whether these are ‘fads’ in higher education or innovations that will stand the test of time is unclear at the moment; however, the pedagogical literature shows that flipped classrooms and team-based learning enhance the effectiveness of teaching in the classroom (see e.g. Eric Mazur’s works).

In addition to the suggestions for curriculum revision, the review committee suggests the following strategies for increasing the number of majors in the program:

1. Work with central advising to identify first time freshman who may have interests in the liberal arts and work to fill the small sections of introduction to philosophy the chair has just established.
2. Remove institutional barriers to pursuing a double major and develop specific flight plans for students in other majors to show them and the administration how double majors can complete in four years.
3. Identify promising students in introduction to philosophy courses and invite them to a philosophy event or have your undergraduate advisor visit sections of intro to philosophy to talk about course offerings, minors, and the major.

4. Make sure that your most engaging and dynamic faculty are teaching at the introductory level and look carefully at DFW rates in these classes as they may signify a need to rethink teaching methods.

VII. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

The review committee met with nine students pursuing the major in Philosophy. The students were overwhelmingly positive about their experience as majors in the department of philosophy. When asked about the strengths of the department the students talked about the fact that there was a strong sense of community in the department. They feel welcome, encouraged, and comfortable amongst the faculty and their peers. They also commented on how caring the faculty are and the excellent advising they receive both regarding their flight plans but also career options. The rigorous and challenging nature of the program was also identified as a strength. Several students remarked that their courses in philosophy were the most challenging and most interesting courses among their FAU courses and that the instruction in these courses was engaging and dynamic.

The only issue the students identified as a potential weakness was the difficulty of scheduling. Some students said that because the flight plan was so specific and because courses for the major are only offered in particular semesters and at times that conflict with their work and activities, it was somewhat difficult to set a plan for completion in four years. This is likely to be the case especially if students are coming to the major later in their academic career. The review committee's recommendations about streamlining the curriculum may help resolve this issue.

Finally, the review committee would like to note that we were extremely impressed by the diversity represented in your undergraduate majors. Philosophy, as a profession, struggles with diversity. This is so even on campuses where the overall student body is diverse. For instance, the number of women pursuing a BA in philosophy has remained at about 30-34% for many decades. Whereas other humanities and social sciences disciplines have seen a fluctuation and increase in women majors, philosophy has remained low and stagnant. The numbers of racial minorities, in particular African American students, is even lower. The department's ability to recruit and retain a diverse group of majors is one of its many strengths.

VIII. SPACE

The review committee toured the Philosophy department office space and found it inadequate. At the time of the 2012 review, the Program review committee reported that the faculty had comfortable and adequate office space. Since that time the department has lost space reducing them to half a hallway and a small seminar room located on a different floor. It is very unclear how additional hires will fit in the current space. The 2012 review committee noted the need for students to have a space to congregate. This has never been addressed. We strongly recommend that the administration work to find adequate space for the faculty and its students.

IX. SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Strengths:

- Research active faculty who have established a name for themselves in their respective sub disciplines.
- Engaging and dynamic teaching and caring advising
- Rigorous curriculum and innovative programs
- A commitment to aligning themselves with University needs, research pillars, and strategic plans.

Weaknesses:

- The number of tenure track faculty is too small to meet the research and instructional needs of their programs.
- In order to increase majors and, in particular, double majors, the curriculum needs to be streamlined and made more flexible.
- Because faculty are bearing a heavy load their research is not being supported.
- Space is inadequate.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Bring the number of tenured and tenure-track faculty to a minimum of seven, if possible by hiring at the beginning assistant professor level rather than at the senior level.
- Increase the flexibility of the curriculum to make it easier for students to complete the major in a timely fashion and for the department to schedule its courses.
- Consider changing the model for teaching and grading work in large sections of Introduction to Philosophy.
- Work to overcome institutional barriers to double majoring and implement recruitment strategies for building the major and minor.
- Continue to develop hiring plans that are in keeping with FAU's research pillars.

XI. RESPONSES TO FACULTY QUESTIONS

On page 42 of the self-study the department posed several questions for the review team. Although some of these questions are addressed in our narrative above, we wanted to make sure that each question was addressed directly.

1. What can the department do in order to further develop productive and fruitful connections and collaborations between philosophy and other disciplines both inside and outside of our college?

The committee feels that the department is doing an excellent job trying to make connections with the STEM fields. In the future, the department may want to explore possibilities for joint hires that serve both philosophy and another discipline.

2. What can the department do to improve the performance of those students in our introductory level, writing intensive courses, who are being exposed to a highly conceptual subject for the first time in their academic career?

This is a challenge faced by virtually every Philosophy department across the country as Philosophy is not a subject taught in high school. There is, however, a growing body of literature on teaching philosophy (see for instance, the journal *Teaching Philosophy*) and several good resources for faculty to explore different techniques for engaging students (<https://www.teachphilosophy101.org>).

3. What are the chief lacunae that the reviewers see in the department as we starting thinking about future hires?

The review committee did not see any holes in the curriculum. We think the idea of hiring in biomedical or environmental ethics and/or philosophy of mind and neuroscience are good ideas and would help align the department with the FAU research pillars.

4. What are the obstacles that stand in the way of our developing an MA program in philosophy at FAU?

The review committee believes that the largest obstacle right now is the lack of tenure-track faculty in the department. Even if the department manages to rebuild to its previous level of 8 tenure track faculty it isn't clear this is sufficient to support an MA program. Compared to other MA programs in Florida the department would still be considerably understaffed. The other obstacle that stands in the way of developing an MA program is that any market analysis of the need for an MA program in Philosophy is likely to show that the demand for such programs is relatively low nationally. However, you may be able to argue that there is a demand on your campus for such programs. Dean Horswell mentioned that local students in Women and Gender Studies have expressed interest in pursuing an MA in philosophy. Developing an interdisciplinary MA in Philosophy and Women and Gender Studies may be more marketable. This would require, however, recruiting a number of faculty working this area.

5. What can the philosophy department do that is not currently doing in order to attract more students to the philosophy major?

Build a relation with the central advising unit. Make sure that those advisors understand the value of your program, its ability to prepare students for careers, and its ability to enhance another major. Work with the Dean to resolve institutional barriers to promoting the double major. Work with faculty whose DFW rates are high compared to other faculty. If success is occurring in some classrooms and not others then the department needs to share best practices.

XII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the review committee believes that the department is doing an excellent job overall given its critically low staffing levels. Faculty have resolved the conflicts that led to receivership. To build on this progress, the department should consider streamlining the curriculum to help ensure students can graduate in four years. And three new tenured or tenure-track hires are needed to make staffing levels minimally adequate. If possible, these should all be at the beginning Assistant Professor level.