

Philosophy

A department in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts offering the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D.

■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

John Martin Fischer, chair (University of California, Riverside)
Louise Antony (Ohio State University)
Louis Loeb (University of Michigan)
Brian McLaughlin (Rutgers University)

■ Main Issues

The visiting team began its discussion by noting that the department “has, for many years (since the 1970s) been regarded as an excellent department.” The department’s scholarly productivity and success in preparing and placing graduate students were both cited. The team noted that there had been a time when division had existed within the department (both intellectual and interpersonal), but reported that the department “now has a unified conception of philosophy ... squarely in the mainstream” and “an extremely congenial atmosphere.”

Nearly all the team’s comments and suggestions centered on the question of faculty size. The team observed that the size of the faculty had fallen from 16.5 to 11.5, which, they said, “has caused a drop in the department’s reputation and is also a contributing cause of its inability to recruit the very best graduate students in the nation.” With a reversal of that trend the department “has the potential of moving into the top fifteen or possibly into the top ten.”

Based on this premise, the team discussed a possible strategy to guide future hiring:

- Noting that highly ranked departments average 21 faculty members, the team argued that 16 should be seen as the “absolute minimum” for UMass Amherst.
- Given recent and prospective retirements, some of this growth should involve highly visible senior scholars.
- Rather than try to cover all specialties, the department should develop “circles of strength” keyed to current capacity.
- On the other hand, the department should not “lock itself into” an attempt to recapture past strength in the history of philosophy, an extremely strong field but one in which there is “no reasonable prospect of replacing the stellar constellation of scholars” lost or to be lost to retirement. Rather, given the highly competitive nature of recruiting in philosophy, hiring emphasis should be on “flexibility” and “opportunism.”

Both the graduate and undergraduate programs were found to be strong. The team’s comments tended to reinforce the points about faculty size. Concerns were expressed about the department’s ability to support enough graduate students and graduate course offerings. In addition, the team felt that TA stipends needed to be more competitive. Similarly, undergraduates were concerned that upper division courses are offered too infrequently.

■ **Results of the Review**

The Dean expressed general agreement with the views of the visiting team, and specifically endorsed the goal of growing the department's faculty to 16 over time. This would be achieved by hiring one additional faculty member each year until the goal is reached, beginning in AY 2003-04. The Dean also authorized an increase in TA stipends in the department, beginning AY2004-05.