

## Philosophy

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

### ■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Mark Kaplan (Indiana University, Bloomington)

Patricia Kitcher (Columbia University)

Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

### ■ Main Issues

The Visiting Team found the Philosophy department to be composed of “active and influential scholars and serious and effective teachers.” Through decanal support and strategic departmental efforts, it has been able to weather the decline of its faculty composition in the 00’s and continue to build its solid reputation by hiring world-class scholars. They also observed that, while the Department receives excellent support from its two staff members (one full-time, the other half-time), the amount of staffing for a department of its size is disproportionately small in comparison with other departments.

Commending the Department for its graduate program, the team noted several of its special features, including its innovative starred paper requirement and new dissertation seminar, but also voiced concerns around structural (especially financial) impediments to competing effectively for the top graduate student candidates on a national level. The reviewers gave very positive feedback about the undergraduate program and its students, noting both the Department’s hard work in revamping the program as well as students’ own appreciation of the learning and mentoring opportunities offered in the major. They cautioned, however, that not as many upper division courses should be taught by graduate students as is currently the case (admitting that there is a delicate balance to be maintained between offering such teaching opportunities to graduate students and giving undergraduate majors courses taught by faculty).

The team offered several specific recommendations:

- Conduct an immediate search for a specialist in Ancient Philosophy.
- Seek approval for at least two more faculty hires, one at the senior level, with the goal to become a top-20 department.
- Increase graduate student stipends to make them comparable to those of competing institutions.
- Establish a pool of funds to enable offers further down the list of graduate school candidates.

- Develop a clear set of expectations for TAs as part of ensuring that all TAs are provided with feedback and support.
- Transform the Chair's office into a shared space for students and faculty.
- Convert the half-time staff position to full-time.

## ■ Results of the Review

The Head expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the Visiting Team, and the time they took to talk with each faculty member individually and meet with graduate students, undergraduates, and staff. He reported that the Department concurs with all findings and recommendations of the reviewers. The Department underscores that the recommendations concerning faculty hiring and graduate student support cannot be fully achieved without support at the college or university level; such support would have a positive impact that would extend into multiple areas for improvement addressed by the Visiting Team, including the provision of faculty to teach a greater proportion of 300 level courses to undergraduate majors. At the same time, the Department has offered, in the case of increasing graduate stipends and making available a pool of funds to attract more graduate students, to draw what it can from its C&PE account as a contribution towards these goals. The Department is working to implement a policy in which all TAs meet with their faculty supervisor on at least a weekly basis to address the "rare occurrence" of insufficient mentoring.

The Dean endorsed many of the findings of the Visiting Team and concurred with its conclusions about the numerous strengths of the Department. The Dean reported that a new faculty member in Ancient Philosophy has been approved for 2010-11; that the College is making across-the-board increases in graduate stipends in the coming year; that one graduate student in the Department is a recipient of the College's pilot program for graduate recruitment/dissertation support; that the conversion of the former Chair's office is underway; and that the conversion of the half-time staff position to full-time will be considered, contingent on the budget situation.

## ■ Student Outcomes Assessment

The Philosophy department has defined a common set of student learning objectives for its undergraduate program. The department has also implemented a new course, Senior Seminar, which provides a direct method to measure students' attainment of these learning goals, in that it requires a substantial, capstone term paper that is evaluated by the instructor in accordance with the goals.

The department also makes use of benchmarking data (course evaluations, graduating senior exit surveys, departmental NSSE results), and from this data has identified areas for improvement:

- Course offerings: new courses are being offered that reflect areas requested by students.
- Career preparation: faculty plan to institute an annual meeting that brings together major students and alumni representatives to discuss career possibilities.