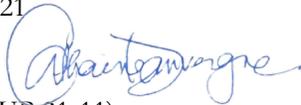




OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC AND PROVOST

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www.sfu.ca/vpacademic**MEMORANDUM**

ATTENTION Senate **DATE** March 01, 2021
FROM Catherine Dauvergne, Vice-President, **PAGES** 1 of 1
Academic and Provost, and Chair, SCUP
RE: External Review Mid-Cycle Report Department of Philosophy (SCUP 21-11)



The External Review of the Department of Philosophy was conducted in February/March 2017. As per Senate guidelines, the Unit is required to submit a mid-cycle report describing its progress in implementing the External Review Action Plan. At its February 17th meeting SCUP reviewed the Department of Philosophy's mid-cycle report.

The mid-cycle report, the Unit's assessment of its Educational Goals, and SCUTL's Feedback on the Educational Goals are attached for the information of Senate.

C: E. Tiffany



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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION Catherine Dauvergne, Chair, SCUP
FROM Wade Parkhouse, Vice-Provost and
Associate Vice-President, Academic
RE: External Review Mid-Cycle Report for the Department of Philosophy

DATE February 5, 2021
PAGES 1 of 1

The External Review of the Department of Philosophy was undertaken in February/March 2017. As per the Senate guidelines, the Unit is required to submit a mid-cycle report describing its progress in implementing the External Review Action Plan and the assessment of its Educational Goals. The update on the Action Plan has been reviewed by the Faculty Dean. The Senate Committee on University Teaching and Learning (SCUTL) has provided feedback to the Unit on the assessment of its Educational Goals. The recommendations from SCUTL will be incorporated into the Unit's self-study report for the next external review.

The following documents are attached for the information of SCUP:

- Update on the Action Plan
- Assessment of Educational Goals
- SCUTL's Feedback on the Educational Goals

c: Evan Tiffany, Chair, Department of Philosophy
Jane Pulkingham, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences



Simon Fraser University
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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION: Dr. Glynn Nicholls, Director, Academic Planning and Quality Assurance

FROM: Evan Tiffany, Chair, Department of Philosophy

RE: External Review Mid-Cycle Report

DATE: December 1, 2020

Please find attached Philosophy's Mid-cycle Report on its External Review as well as our narrative Assessment Report on our Department's Educational Goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "E. Tiffany".

Evan Tiffany
Chair, Associate Professor
Simon Fraser University

External Review Mid-Cycle Report for the Department of Philosophy

Action	Progress Made
1. Programming	
1.1.1 Undergraduate	
Recommendation 2: The Department's Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) is reviewing the honours program with an aim to implement both the recommendation to reduce the number of honours tutorials from two to one and the recommendation to consolidate its offering into an honours seminar replacing individual reading courses.	This is still under review by the UCC. Progress was stalled due to other initiatives taking priority. In addition, the UCC is considering other potential changes to its curriculum, including to our 400-level advanced seminars, which could impact how we might make structural changes to the honours program.
Recommendation 3: The Department will continue the process of articulating its educational goals with an eye to ensuring a fit between the stated goals and its approach to curriculum design. The Department will also review all its calendar descriptions and endeavour to make them as specific as possible given the aims of the course.	The UCC completed its review of the calendar descriptions and made revisions where appropriate. In both retreats and smaller groups of teaching cohorts (e.g. instructors in the logic stream or ethics stream), the Department has continued the process of articulating its goals and ensuring fit between those goals and curriculum design. This has led to revisions in both the formal/logic stream and the ethics/law streams.
Recommendation 4a. The Department will continue to develop a Strategic Plan in order to: (i) articulate a sense of how Philosophy conceives of itself, its strengths, and its role in the broader context of FASS and SFU, and (ii) identify concrete goals and develop strategies for achieving those goals.	Philosophy, like all units, created a 5-year plan in 2018. This included articulating how Philosophy conceives of itself and its role in the broader context of FASS and SFU. Philosophy sees its strengths as being in three core areas: ethics/law, logic and philosophy of science/math, and the history of philosophy. It also sees itself as committed to interdisciplinarity. We have boosted numbers of our two interdisciplinary Certificates (Ethics and Philosophy of Science); we've joined with Beedie to create a new Joint Major in Business, Law and Philosophy; we revised our logic/formal curriculum in consultation with Mathematics and Cognitive Science; and we teamed with Political Science, Linguistics, and Economics in creating a new minor in Social Data Analytics.
Recommendation 5. The Department will work to identify the teaching support it requires and to communicate its needs to IT Service, TLC, the Library, and other units as needed.	Philosophy has communicated these needs and continues to do so as needed.

<p>Recommendations 6 and 7: Philosophy's UCC will review all of its calendar descriptions in order to make them as specific as possible, given the aims of the course.</p> <p>Recommendation 8: Philosophy aims to regularize its course offerings on a two-year cycle, to the extent that is possible. While difficult to do on a trimester system in which faculty are on different teaching schedules, we are aware that having this kind of predictability is essential for students to be able to plan their course of study so as to complete their degrees in a timely manner.</p>	<p>The UCC has reviewed the calendar descriptions and made changes where needed.</p> <p>Philosophy has regularized offerings as much as possible. For example, PHIL 121 and 144 are now offered every Fall semester; PHIL 201, 203, and 221 are offered every Fall and Spring; PHIL 341 is offered every Spring. Where we are unable to fix the timing of courses, we have ensured that required courses are offered with sufficient frequency to allow students to complete their degrees (e.g. we have gradually increased the rate of offerings of our 300-level law and ethics courses in order to keep up with demand.)</p>
<p>1.1.2 Graduate</p>	
<p>Recommendation 4b: (Part of the strategic plan) The Department will continue to develop ways to recruit and support our Graduate Students, particularly Canadian ones. We will enlist the services of our new Communications Officer (see below).</p>	<p>Since Sept. 2017, Philosophy has had a new Grad Program Chair who has worked with our Communications Officer on this. Since the past review, we have seen an increase in both the quantity and quality of applications to our graduate program.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9: The Graduate Committee, with the help of the new Communications Officer, will work to make the necessary improvements to the clarity and transparency of our Graduate policies and procedures.</p>	<p>The new Grad Program Chair has greatly improved the transparency of the graduate program, most importantly by implementing the practice of conducting intake interviews and documenting those interviews in writing, so that there is a written record of exactly what requirements each incoming graduate student must complete in order to graduate.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10: The Department currently conducts a TA orientation at the beginning of every Fall term and hosts a series of W-training workshops every year, conducted by the Writing Services Coordinator from the Student Learning Commons. The Department will continue to work on improving the TA portal on our website and plans to institute a head-TA position which would serve as both a resource and an informal evaluator.</p>	<p>We have created a TA portal, which includes teaching support for grad students, including a document that was drafted by experienced TAs under the supervision of the Grad Program Chair called "How to TA." This document includes tips on everything from the first week, to time management, to using Canvas and conducting tutorials. We experimented with a Head TA position with mixed results. One challenge for Philosophy is that we only have an MA program, so there is quite a bit of turn-over from year to year and a lack of "seasoned veterans."</p>
<p>Recommendation 11: New Research Assistantship and other FIC fund guidelines are being developed.</p>	<p>Guidelines on RAs have been developed, providing the needed transparency to the process.</p>

<p>2. Research</p>	
<p>Recommendation 12: The Report recognizes that “the Department has both a history of influential research and a faculty complement currently producing impressive scholarship” and that “Department faculty hold various research grants...[which] locate the Department at the centre of scholarly networks on various research questions,” but notes that the Department’s success at securing funding falls short of “its established research excellence.” Departmental grant applications have been going up in recent years and we expect the trend to continue. While we recognize the importance of grants for the University’s reputation and for the additional support they provide for graduate students, quality philosophical research is not primarily grant-dependent. Philosophy is seriously invested in having top researchers and, while grant applications are strongly encouraged, they do not form part of the fabric of our work the way they do in other units.</p>	<p>While Philosophy continues to be a discipline whose research does not depend on grant funding, it has seen increased success in grant applications over the past few years. To provide just a few examples of this success: one faculty member received a \$75K SSHRC Insight grant, another received a private grant from the Foundational Questions Institute for their Consciousness in the Physical World large grants program. One faculty member is the Principle Investigator for a recently approved a \$2.78 million SSHRC partnership grant, to establish open access resources and training programs to help young researchers develop digital research skills, ensuring that previously unrecognized voices are heard and remain accessible for future scholars. These are all considerable achievements for an Arts department.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4c (Part of strategic plan). The Department will develop a formal strategy for building on its research strengths, both in terms of (i) encouraging and facilitating the research of its current faculty, and (ii) planning for future hiring. Philosophy will seek ways to better promote its research success, with the help of a Communications Officer, through changes to our website and other communications strategies. As well, the Department plans to create greater efficiency with respect to administrative work (see part 3), thereby allowing faculty more time to focus on research.</p>	<p>Philosophy has successfully built on its strengths through a series of recent hires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on our strength in metaphysics and logic, we hired two Assistant Professors away from Stanford University. (One of these hires also had a teaching competence in Classical Chinese philosophy, which she has taught regularly for us.) • Building on our strength in ethics and philosophy of law, we hired an Assistant Professor with a JD and PhD to teach in our philosophy and law stream. • Most recently, we have been able to both build on our strength in ethics and expand our curriculum by hiring a faculty member with expertise in Buddhist and pan-Indian philosophy (and competencies in Chinese philosophy), as well as expertise in contemporary ethical theory.

	<p>I have tried to cultivate a departmental ethos in which we think of ourselves as a research department (while maintaining our strong commitment to teaching excellence). I have implemented a plan for teaching assignments that minimizes new course preps as much as possible and ensures that faculty members are able to regularly teach advanced seminars in their area of research.</p> <p>The Department has worked with the Communications Coordinator to better promote the research of both faculty and graduate students on our website. For example, our website includes a “News” and “Spotlight” section: https://www.sfu.ca/philosophy.html</p>
<p>3. Administration</p>	
<p>Recommendation 13: The External Review is pleased with the way the Department has managed to deal with the conflict of interest problems inherent in having several couples in a small department and recommends that the University work to articulate a more explicit conflict of interest policy, especially as regards faculty members who have personal relationships with one another. Should the University be unable to articulate one in a timely manner, the Department would like to have the opportunity of working out the details of such a policy in our Department, but this will require some outside expert assistance.</p>	<p>The Department has not yet developed a set of formal conflict of interest guidelines, apart from general University guidelines. We will reach out to Suman Jiwani in Faculty Relations for help developing a set of guidelines.</p>
<p>Recommendation 14: The Department plans to increase the responsibilities of the two major sub-chairs, graduate and undergraduate, while associating the course releases with the two positions. This will result in fewer <i>ad hoc</i> committees and an increase in administrative efficiency. In addition, the Department plans to increase efficiency by relying less on the committee-of-the-whole and more on the relevant standing committees to draft specific policy proposals. As a small Department, Philosophy takes pride in the democratic nature of its self-governance, but it agrees</p>	<p>The Department has already implemented this structural change, resulting in more work being done at the committee level, leading to greater efficiency, fewer meetings of the entire Department, and the elimination of <i>ad hoc</i> committees.</p> <p>The Communications Coordinator has created a faculty portal which contains most of the information described in the response. We are still working on creating descriptions of the committee duties as those evolve over time.</p>

<p>that more work could be done more efficiently at the committee-level before an issue is brought to the floor for a vote by the entire Department.</p> <p>The outgoing major committee chairs will draft a description of the duties that they carry out, to be revised regularly by standing committee chairs and made available on our website.</p> <p>A new faculty portal is being created, awaiting the arrival of the Communications Officer, where complete committee lists will be available, as well as descriptions of the committees' duties, department minutes, a departmental policy gazette, and other administrative information.</p>	
<p>4. Working Environment</p>	
<p>Recommendation 4d: The Department would very much like to develop and maintain relations with our alumni and has made efforts in this direction in the past. With the help of the Communications Officer, plans include: publishing an annual newsletter to be sent to Philosophy alumni that will not only communicate what is happening at SFU Philosophy but highlight the achievements of alumni, having an "Alumni News" section prominent on the website, and hosting alumni events to facilitate the interaction among alumni and between alumni and current students.</p>	<p>Through the Communications Coordinator, Philosophy has made an effort to include from Alumni in the "News" section of its website. One of our faculty members is working with the Communications Coordinator on alumni outreach. They put together a survey, which led to 40 volunteers to be interviewed about career paths and/or participate in roundtables or other events for current students. Some of the planned activities have been put on hold due to the pandemic. In addition to hosting alumni-led events for current students, the next step is to consolidate information about the types of careers open to Philosophy majors and have this information available on the website, perhaps with suggested informal streams and/or course recommendations.</p>
<p>Recommendation 15: The posting for a part time (two days per week) Communications Officer is being created as this report is written. We have many plans for using this new resource, some of which have been detailed above.</p>	<p>We have hired a Communications Coordinator who has proved to be invaluable not only for many of the items listed in this document, but also for promoting our new credential programs and putting together a virtual congratulations video for the graduating Covid Class of 2020.</p>

Midcycle Report on Educational Goals and Assessment

Department of Philosophy

In articulating the program-level goals, the Department of Philosophy used a two-step process for coming up with our Educational Goals. First, we asked faculty who teach certain courses to form small groups and to come up with a set of Educational Goals for those courses. Then we looked for commonalities across the various course-level goals. This revealed two fundamental goals: the acquisition of a certain body of knowledge (goal 1) and the acquisition of certain skills (goals 2-6). This report outlines these goals and provides a narrative summary of the types of assignments and pedagogical strategies employed in assessing how well students have achieved these goals. As most of these goals are interconnected, the assignments and strategies often are designed to achieve more than one of these goals. The report concludes with an acknowledgement of the work that still needs to be done in terms of having a plan in place for assessing the extent to which the stated links between assignments and education goals is borne out in the classroom and a plan for completing that work.

1. Program goal: *Display disciplinary knowledge of core philosophical concepts.*

Through written work on exams and papers, students must demonstrate an understanding of the philosophical concepts and theories central to ethics, metaphysics & epistemology, and the history of philosophy.

Lower division courses tend to be more of a broad survey of concepts and theories, while upper division courses tend to go more in depth on a narrower range of topics. As such, exams and short written assignments are more common in lower division courses while upper division courses typically require a series of medium-length papers.

Some Philosophy exams include multiple-choice questions; more commonly, they focus on short written answers ranging between one sentence to two paragraphs in length. Exam questions assess whether students *know* the definitions of key concepts, understand the *logical relationships* between different concepts and theories, and whether they are able to *apply* those concepts and theories to novel situations.

Lower division paper assignments tend to be *scaffolded* and *progressive*. The first assignment is typically very short (one to two paragraphs) and focused on a single skill such as explicating an author's view; some instructors start with the even more basic skill of providing an argument map. One additional skill is added at each subsequent "level" of assignment, culminating in a complete philosophical essay of the kind that students are expected to write at the upper division. These assignments are used to assess the students' knowledge of course content as well as to begin developing the skills articulated in goals 2 and 3.

2. Program goal: *Write a substantial essay in which a philosophical argument is used to defend a particular conclusion*

Through written assignments, students are to demonstrate the ability to articulate and defend a thesis, charitably reconstruct an author's argument, and critically engage with an author's argument.

Philosophy is an inherently writing-intensive discipline. The primary vehicle of assessment in PHIL courses (other than logic courses) is the essay. In 200 and 300 level courses, papers are usually around 1500-2000 words and narrowly focused on a single article or section of text. The modest length and narrow focus is designed to enable students to focus on developing their analytic writing skills, with an emphasis on: succinctness, precision of language, organization, and cogency.

3. Program goal: *Defend an original argument, both verbally and in writing, against philosophical objections.*

In addition to being an inherently writing-intensive discipline, philosophy is also inherently dialectical. Philosophic methodology consists in the collective pursuit of truth through dialectic or "cooperative argumentative dialogue." Philosophical arguments consist of a connected series of statements or premises that provide logical support for a given conclusion or thesis. An important part of philosophical progress consists in subjecting arguments to critical analysis and defending one's own arguments against criticisms.

In order to assist students in developing these skills, the "Socratic method" is often used in the classroom in which students are encouraged to ask and answer questions about the course readings in an effort to critically engage with the author's argument, uncover underlying assumptions, and test for consistency with other beliefs.

This goal is typically accomplished through both low-stakes reflections on readings (typically done in advance of class) and oral discussion in the classroom. This begins in tutorials in our 100 level courses and is a central feature in most 300 level courses. Our 400 level seminars tend to be almost exclusively based on this kind of dialectic contribution from the seminar participants.

Upper division paper assignments often require students to anticipate and articulate objections to their own position and then to provide responses to those objections. This is especially important by the time students get to 400-level courses.

4. Program goal: *Perform independent philosophical research, which includes finding relevant primary and secondary sources, expositing the philosophical positions found in them, and philosophically assessing them.*

All of our 400 level courses are taught as seminars, typically in combination with an 800 level graduate course. These seminars focus on developing research skills and producing longer papers (3000-5000 words) that draw on multiple sources. The seminar papers are

produced in multiple stages. Typically, there is a proposal/literature-review stage, in which students identify: the central question they are seeking to answer in the paper, a rough outline of how they propose to answer that question, and a list of sources that they expect to draw on in composing the paper. Students then submit a complete first draft of the paper on which they receive extensive feedback before revising and submitting the final draft. Some faculty also have students present their research project to the class as part of a “mini-conference” in order to gain practice presenting material as well as receive feedback from the other students.

Some faculty also have used “working groups” in which students divide into smaller groups of 3-4 students based on similarity of research topic. These are student-led groups in which students share with one another articles they have found on a given topic and provide a brief summary of those articles. In doing so, the students work collaboratively to help each other find relevant articles, identify connections between different papers, narrow down the focus of their project, and receive peer feedback on their ideas. Instructors who have used the working group model report that the final seminar papers are on average much better than when students work alone. At our next Department retreat, I will have instructors who have used this model give a presentation to the Department and encourage others to either adapt it or find other ways of facilitating this educational goal of developing independent research skills.

5. Program goal: *Employ core critical reasoning skills, including the ability to understand and identify the foundational concepts of critical reasoning, including truth, rationality, deduction and induction.*

While critical thinking is integrated into all of our courses and many of our program goals, Philosophy also has the goal of teaching formal methods for engaging in critical thinking and logical reasoning. These goals are accomplished primarily through our two quantitative lower division courses PHIL 105: Critical Thinking and PHIL 110: Introduction to Logic and Reasoning.

The primary method of assessment in both of these courses is a combination of low-stakes weekly homework assignments, as well as higher-stakes examinations.

6. Program goal: *Use formal methods to critically engage with certain philosophical problems or questions.*

In addition to being a writing-intensive discipline, philosophy also depends on logic and formal analysis. We consider it to be a selling feature of a philosophy degree that it combines the kind of discursive writing and qualitative analysis characteristic of the humanities with the kind of formal methodology characteristic of mathematics and science.

At the lower division, these objectives are typically assessed through homework assignments and exams. At the upper division, these objectives are also often assessed through a final paper in addition to homework and exams. The paper requires students to

combine discursive writing with formal analysis in order to critically engage with some philosophical topic.

Further Steps

The process of articulating and assessing Educational Goals (EGs) is new and we are still very much in the learning phase of the process. The Philosophy Department took the process of articulating the EGs as a chance to reflect on the structure of our curriculum, the value of a philosophy degree, and how to align our course-based assessments with our stated objectives. While we will continue to work on refining these things, I think we have done a good job at thinking about the ultimate goals of a philosophy degree and how to structure our curriculum, courses, and assignments to best achieve those EGs. I think we have also done a good job at structuring the curriculum such that the EGs are progressive and incremental from the 100 through the 400 level. What remains is a more concrete plan for how to assess the extent to which students are in fact attaining these goals. Specifically, we need to determine what specific data we need to collect and to develop a plan for collecting and analyzing that data. This we plan to do at our next faculty retreat (once we are able to meet collectively in person again) with the help of an EG consultant from the Centre for Educational Excellence. We will have a plan in place, and should be able to have some preliminary data, by the next External Review.



Mid-Cycle Educational Goals Assessment Report Review

Provided by SCUTL, the Senate Committee on University Teaching and Learning

Unit name: **Philosophy**

Date: 12 January 2021

This form provides feedback from members of the SCUTL subcommittee that reviews plans and reports resulting from SFU external reviews. Our aim is to provide formative feedback on the work being undertaken to set and assess educational goals for programs at SFU. As the inclusion of SCUTL in the external review process is new, we would appreciate hearing from the unit regarding whether this feedback is helpful so we can continue to revise and improve our process. Please feel free to contact the Chair of SCUTL, Elizabeth Elle, at any time (avplt@sfu.ca).

We found that in order to provide feedback on mid-cycle reports, we needed to also consider the assessment plan produced at the start of the external review process. This worksheet notes where particular elements are present in the plan or the assessment, if they are aligned with the aims of the unit, and the strengths and weaknesses of both the plan and the mid-cycle assessment. SCUTL is working from these guiding principles: assessment plans should be **feasible**, **context-sensitive**, and **assess the program, not individual instructors or courses**.

Stage	Element	Plan	Report	Other Comments/Suggestions
Plan and Prioritize	Who will work on the assessment and why			The unit described a thoughtful process for developing EGs from course-level goals.
	Department context provided			Unclear.
	Plan for engaging faculty		Plan to discuss working groups in 400-level seminars in dept retreat, encourage others to adopt it or find other ways of supporting students in attaining EG	
	Reasonable timeframe			Not yet articulated.
Define and Refine	EGs are broken down to measurable sub-goals			
	Revise EGs (if unit deems necessary)			

Curriculum Mapping	Identification of key courses that address specific EGs	Listed a number of direct sources of data along with relevant courses.		
	Curriculum mapping plan (e.g. Introduce/Develop/Proficient; instructional strategies; assessments)	Have connected EGs to course-based assessments.	Have extended analysis done in plan (mapping) to differentiate between lower and upper level.	The pedagogical methods used were described and the department is thoughtful about different kinds of teaching and their utility for students. Demonstrates attention to scaffolded learning across the program.
Assess and Discuss	Specific direct, course-based evidence of student learning as linked to particular EGs		For EG 4, they point to certain courses that use 'working groups', and that they may want to compare these courses with those that do not use working groups.	A useful next step would be to consider discipline-appropriate ways to describe student achievement.
	Feasible plan for collecting additional data (indirect evidence), if needed			Not yet being considered.
	Rationale for data collection, including alignment with EGs. Analysis plan is clear and feasible.		Unclear what data they may collect and analyse	The department clarified the expectations embedded in the program EGs and how the assignments in different courses attempt to assess student achievement. The pedagogical methods used were also described and the department is thoughtful about different kinds of teaching and their utility for students. They are not yet at the point of data collection.
	Plan to share findings within unit		Plan to discuss working groups in 400-level seminars in dept retreat, encourage others to adopt it or find other ways of supporting students in attaining EG	

Implement Improvements	(Provisional) Plan for using findings			Not yet articulated.
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Strengths: Well formulated EGs, careful attention to scaffolding of classroom assessments. Strong example of working groups methodology in 4th year seminars tied to EGs, and plan to discuss this more broadly in department in order to better support students in attaining the EG. Attention paid to the expectations embedded in the program EGs and how the assignments in different courses attempt to assess student achievement; a consideration of pedagogy.

Weaknesses: Describes course-based assessments that are aligned with EGs, which is great, but the department does not yet use course-based assessments to evaluate student attainment of the EGs.

Recommendation: Consider how to design a discipline-specific way of measuring student assessment within courses as aligned to the EGs. One idea would be to focus assessment efforts on the working groups in 4th year seminars, as this is an area the department is interested in. The Specialist, Program Assessment can help to design this in a way that respects faculty workloads.

If you would like support for re-imagining direct or indirect assessments, please consider contacting Alice Campbell in CEE, who is in a new role of Specialist, Program Assessment (alice_campbell@sfu.ca)