

California State University, Fullerton

Program Performance Review

Philosophy

Overview

The Department of Philosophy at California State University Fullerton is strong and very healthy. The chair of the department, Professor Heather Battaly, has the support of faculty, staff, students, and administration. The review team was quite impressed with her intelligent vision, leadership, and dedication. The faculty report that they have a great deal of confidence in Professor Battaly as chair and that they feel well represented and supported by her; they feel that she works hard for them and for the department. The faculty seems quite happy with their colleagues and with the educational atmosphere and intellectual life of the department. In a discipline in which women are grossly underrepresented, across the nation and around the world, Cal State Fullerton's philosophy department has a very impressive and enviable gender parity among its tenured and tenure-track faculty. The faculty are actively and enthusiastically engaged in research, and the department is seen by the profession as a thriving center for interesting and important work in several areas of philosophy. Since the department's last program review, faculty has published 15 books, two journal issues, 92 articles, and 26 reviews, not to mention their having given over 160 conference presentations. In addition, since its last program review, the department has secured six external grants, totaling over \$165,000.00 (which strikes the review team as an unusual and extraordinary accomplishment for a philosophy department in the United States). The faculty seems to be doing an admirable job of making themselves available to students. It has taken significant steps to reach out to its students and to promote student success—for example, the department is working to improve student retention and placement; it has created a Climate Committee to ensure that the resources of the department and its major are fully available to students of all genders and ethnicities; and it has created opportunities for faculty and students to collaborate, especially at its annual Symposium, where, after working closely with faculty, select philosophy majors comment on papers presented by professional philosophers.

Faculty

Achievements

The Philosophy faculty justifiably feels proud of the department. The department's publication record is excellent. Since the 3-3 teaching load became the departmental norm in the fall of 2005, the faculty became almost twice as prolific. The department is also reaching and exceeding its target goals for teaching. It is attracting a growing number of majors, and its enrollments are high. Members of the department reported high satisfaction with the department and their working conditions. In sum, the department is healthy, collegial, cooperative, and effective, and faculty attitudes reflect this.

Faculty/student relations are excellent, as comments from the students with whom the committee spoke confirmed. Of particular note in this connection is the annual Symposium, in which students introduce and comment on papers by luminaries in the subfield that is the topic for the year. This format may be unique to CSU-Fullerton; it is certainly exceptional. In preparation, students interact closely with faculty members in the department, and during the Symposium they interact closely with the visiting faculty. This format provides strong incentive for students to work at a high level of competence and professionalism, and it enables them to engage in philosophical conversation with experts in the field. Such focused attention to the development of undergraduate research and professional participation is rare and highly commendable.

Concerns

1. Virtually every faculty member we interviewed emphasized the importance of the 3-3 teaching load to both their research and their teaching. The possibility that the teaching load might become heavier is a serious concern for the faculty. The PPR Committee agrees with the faculty that it is of the highest priority if the department

is to maintain its current excellence in both research and teaching. The reduction of this load from 4-4 to 3-3 resulted in the faculty becoming dramatically more prolific in their research. The students profit enormously when they are taught by faculty who are actively engaged in research and on top of developments in the field. Besides the greater expertise that they share with students, such faculty members typically display greater enthusiasm for what they are teaching than those who are not active researchers, a factor in retaining student interest in philosophy courses. Maintaining the 3-3 load is also essential to attracting and retaining the best faculty.

2. The faculty is concerned about the dwindling amount of funding available for travel to conferences. This is a particular problem for those at the earlier stages of their career, when making conference presentations is important for building *curricula vitae* and making a name for themselves in their fields. The networking also helps faculty members to attain their research goals, and it enhances the reputation of the University. The cost of attending conferences (particularly international conferences) is prohibitive for most faculty members unless institutional support is provided. Funding directed toward travel to conferences is money well spent in terms of the development and achievements of faculty members.

3. Faculty members expressed concern that their salaries are not keeping up with increases in the cost of living, which imposes a burden on them. They also pointed out the problem of salary compression, in which the baseline of the salaries of those hired at an earlier point in time are significantly lower than those hired later, sometimes with the effect that the former never catch up to the latter in terms of compensation. While this is a problem in many institutions, the inequities that result should certainly be addressed.

4. The lack of institutional support for outside grants is another problem area. Those who have received outside support have found it difficult to determine which offices at CSU-Fullerton need to be involved in the administration of their grants, and they have found the requirements regarding paperwork confusing. The process of accessing the funding provided by the grant is often delayed, sometimes to such an extent that it is difficult to proceed with the research for which the grant has been provided (particularly when some of it involves interaction with distant participants who need to be paid in a timely manner). Given the value that such grants have to

the University, it would clearly be to the advantage of all parties to facilitate their administration.

5. The administrative burden for faculty members at CSU-Fullerton is high, and some members of the faculty mentioned the difficulty of juggling their various obligations in light of this. In some cases, very demanding administrative tasks prove onerous if the workload is not lessened in other respects. In these cases, the PPR committee agreed, a course reduction is warranted. The Chair, for instance, should receive an additional course reduction. The PPR committee understands that chairs of large departments do not teach at all, while chairs of medium size departments such as Philosophy have a 2-2 teaching load. While some of the work involved in administering a large department may be greater than that involved in administering a smaller department, many of the tasks are similar, and the status quo is inequitable. A teaching load reduction for the Chair seems an appropriate way to address this inequity.

An example of a special and burdensome administrative task that deserves a course reduction is the work that will be involved in following through on the department's initiative to determine why the presence of women and minority group members in philosophy courses drops off after GE courses have been taken, and why the percentage of these groups among philosophy majors is so low. In light of the gender parity among full-time faculty, and thus the presence of female role models, the low percentage of female students is particularly puzzling. The Department's Climate Committee has been appointed to investigate the causes and to determine what must be done to address this situation. The College has expressed enthusiasm for this undertaking, encouraging the Philosophy Department to develop this initiative in such a way that it can be applied across the College. The amount of data that will need to be collected, compared, and analyzed in order to accomplish this will make this a massive undertaking, for answers to the causal questions will depend on getting data from other institutions and comparing it to local patterns. The PPR committee thinks that the person charged with amassing, collating, and organizing this data so that it can be analyzed should be given relief in the form of a semester's course reduction. (The committee was also concerned that junior faculty members have been assigned leadership roles on this project, for time that is devoted to this

initiative is time that is unavailable for research, and the research record counts heavily in the ultimate tenure decision. This matter is also noted below.)

6. Several members of the faculty stressed the importance of the faculty not growing too fast. As the departmental self-study put it, the department is committed to “slow and steady growth.” This strikes the PPR committee as a very sound aim. Hiring too many new people too quickly could jeopardize the very functional and cooperative character of the faculty and the consequent health of the department.

Temporary Faculty/Students/Staff

The temporary faculty who teach in the department report feeling integrated into the department and supported both by the department as a whole and especially by its chair, Professor Battaly. Those temporary faculty members who met with the review team consider themselves valued and respected by the department. The review team notes, however, that the temporary faculty would like to have office space that is better connected to the rest of the faculty, who make their home in H 311/313, a wonderful space that has come to be known as “Plato’s Cave.” Having offices near the rest of the faculty—in H 314, for example—would help them feel even more integrated into the department.

The students who met with the review team enjoy the department and appreciate all the department and its faculty do for them. They are very enthusiastic about their experience in the department, especially the availability of faculty for mentoring and philosophical discussion, which is an essential component of a philosophical education. Students feel at home in the commons area of “Plato’s Cave,” where they can read, study, and interact with each other, and with the faculty whose offices are in that space. The department’s annual Symposium gives several philosophy majors the chance to work closely with faculty in planning, organizing, and carrying out the event, and it gives them the opportunity to comment on papers presented by professional philosophers, which they do in front of large audiences that usually include several distinguished philosophers. There seem to be a number of effective organizations for philosophy students, some of which focus on community activism. The students who met with the review team did express an interest in having more

information about pursuing graduate degrees in philosophy. Having conversations about graduate school and helping students both with gathering information about particular graduate programs and with applying to graduate school seem to be excellent ways for faculty to connect and interact with students. The students also want more information about the Concentration in Moral, Legal and Social Philosophy for the Professions and to be kept up to date about changes to it. The department does plan to evaluate the Concentration's curriculum and is considering expanding the Concentration, which now focuses on pre-law, to focus in addition on medical ethics, environmental ethics, and business ethics.

The review team met with one member of the staff, the Administrative Support Coordinator (ASC) for Liberal Studies, Philosophy, and Women's Studies. Both the faculty and the staff made it clear to the review team that more staff is needed, preferably an Administrative Support Assistant (ASA) for Philosophy. More staff is needed in order to handle administrative tasks such as organizing the annual Symposium and organizing the department's active colloquium series, which includes an annual Alamshah talk and an annual Ellington talk, and a research conference, which is held every three years.

Curricular Issues

The curriculum offered by this department is broad, rich, and well balanced. As the department's report notes, it remains "ahead of the curve" with respect to two disciplinary trends—emphasizing globalization and Asian philosophy; and promoting pluralism with respect to analytic and continental philosophy. Since the last PPR, several significant changes have been implemented related to the structure of the major and minor. Required classes have been reorganized into streamlined categories that better match the department's Student Learning Goals; these new categories have also allowed for the incorporation of new classes developed by recently hired faculty. The minor has also been restructured; whereas the old plan involved a more complicated system with an "Option A" and an "Option B," the new plan offers a straightforward and more flexible 21-unit minor. All of these changes have simplified advisement; they should also allow students to graduate more quickly. The department has also been successful in explaining these new requirements to its

majors and minors. In fact, in our meeting with students, several commented on how easy it was to understand precisely what was required for graduation.

Although the structure of the Concentration in Moral, Legal and Social Philosophy for the Professions has not changed, the department has begun to reconsider how this program is conceived as well as marketed to students. While it is now largely a pre-law program (with an excellent record of placing students in prestigious law schools), the department plans to expand its offerings in medical ethics, environmental ethics, and business ethics. It is also considering hiring someone in the future with a specialization in Philosophy and Public Policy. Expanding this Concentration seems like a wise strategy in preparing philosophy majors, to the degree possible, not only for advanced studies but also for employment in a variety of fields. In fact, the department seems very aware of the need to emphasize job placement, particularly in today's very difficult economic environment.

Plans for an online course are also underway. Philosophy 312 (Business Ethics) has been offered online during intersession. A Business Ethics class is also being developed for the Online Masters curriculum for both Sociology and Business Administration. Here too we see the department's commitment to emphasizing the relevance of philosophy to a broad range of occupations, including business.

Assessment

The Department has done an outstanding job of developing and implementing an Assessment Plan. Its broader Strategic Plan, approved in December 2012, sets out a clear set of goals as well as timetables to implement them. Assessing learning outcomes forms an important component of this plan. Of the 17 components needed to document academic achievement (see Appendix III), 14 are already either "developed" or "highly developed." One component (involving utilizing findings) is listed as "emerging" while only 2 (involving multiple or indirect measures of assessment) are in the planning stages. For these last two components, the planning process is already well underway, for an outside survey of alumni conducted for the department by the College of Humanities & Social Sciences has very recently been

completed. This will supply an indirect method of assessment that can be used in conjunction with the direct methods already implemented.

The process developed for the direct assessment of Learning Outcomes is particularly impressive. To assess its effectiveness, the department collects hundreds of papers produced by students in its 300 and 400 level classes. In separately assessing each of its four main goals—Critical Thinking; Critical Writing; Knowledge; and Social and Global Awareness—it has developed four different rubrics. These rubrics are used to supply a numerical rating for each paper being assessed; numerical ratings are then translated into four categories: “Exemplary,” “Proficient,” “Developing,” or “Inadequate.” The department’s goal is for at least 75% of the work produced by its seniors to reach the level considered “Proficient” or above. While this goal has been met, the results have also illuminated specific areas in which there is still room for improvement. Assessments of Critical Thinking and Critical Writing are now conducted annually, while the Knowledge and Social and Global Awareness assessments are conducted biennially. An overall Assessment Report containing a detailed summary of findings as well as suggestions for improvement is then produced annually during the spring semester. The entire process reflects a very thorough as well as thoughtful group effort.

The department has also begun “closing the loop” by using the results of its assessment process to implement curricular changes. This is most evident in the discussion of the outcomes concerning “Social and Global Awareness,” first assessed in spring 2012. In closely considering ways to meet this goal, the department became aware that more needs to be done to ensure that syllabi directly address issues of gender, culture, and ethnicity. Moreover, to be sure that students take enough classes that address these issues, the category of the curriculum called “Ethics” was expanded and reconceived as “Ethics and Society.” Thus, findings from the assessment process have been incorporated into a broader process of curricular restructuring.

These findings are also linked to the department’s concern with redressing the gender imbalance among its majors, for less than 25 percent of its majors are women on a campus with 57 percent female enrollment. Although this reflects a national pattern found among departments of philosophy, the department has decided to

address this issue directly by creating a Climate Committee to consider the “general climate” facing women and minorities within this discipline. This will involve a complex process of assessing quantitative and qualitative data comparatively. We strongly support the department’s interest in responding to this issue as well as its belief that a faculty member involved in the time-consuming process of generating and analyzing local and national data receive a course release.

Student Retention and Graduation Rates

In analyzing the success of its majors, the department has also examined retention rates, graduation rates, and length of time needed to complete a degree. However, since most philosophy majors are transfer students or students who changed their major once they entered CSUF, analyzing 4-year graduation rates is difficult. What is known is that between 50 and 60 percent of two cohorts (2006 and 2007) of transfer students graduated within four years. Unfortunately, the department does not yet have enough comparative data make sense of such findings or to assess these critical issues in a significant way. To address this, Goal 7 (Promote Student Success) of its Strategic Plan spells out the need to compare this department’s data with data from other majors and from other CSU and UC campuses. To accomplish this, the department is requesting that one faculty member receive a course reduction in order to produce and analyze comparative data dealing with retention and graduation. This request makes sense to us, if the university is serious about improving graduation rates.

Summary and Recommendations

The Department of Philosophy at California State University Fullerton is vibrant and strong. Its chair is committed to the department and to maintaining its institutional health and wellbeing. The temporary faculty find the department to be supportive and nurturing, and the staff is happy working in the department and with its faculty and students. The students who spoke with the review team are enthusiastic and pleased with the faculty as mentors and as educators. The review team was very impressed overall with CSUF’s Department of Philosophy. The team’s major concerns lead it to make the following recommendations:

1. It is recommended that the department and the college maintain the tenured and tenure-track faculty's 3-3 teaching load. This is crucial if the department is to sustain its current excellence in research and in teaching. As noted earlier in the report, the reduction of the teaching load from 4-4 to 3-3 resulted in the faculty becoming dramatically more prolific in their research, and it redounds to the benefit of students to be taught by faculty who are actively engaged in research and on top of developments in their field. Faculty who are actively engaged in research are typically more enthusiastic about what they teach than those who are not active researchers, and this contributes to healthy enrollments and to student retention. Maintaining the 3-3 load is also essential to attracting and retaining the best faculty.
2. The review team recommends that faculty engaged in demanding administrative tasks, such as serving as chair of the department's Climate Committee or gathering comparative data that could help improve retention and graduation rates, should be granted a course reduction. Moreover, it is recommended that the chair of the department be granted an additional course reduction per semester, in order to keep up with the administrative demands of that position.
3. The review team recommends that an ASA for Philosophy be hired as soon as possible. This is needed in order to handle administrative tasks such as organizing the annual Symposium, the department's active colloquium series, and the research conference that is held every three years.
4. The review team recommends that the Department of Philosophy be given additional office space—such as H 314—in close proximity to its current office space, H 311/313. As it is, the department feels discouraged from hiring new tenure-track faculty by the fact that it would have no place to put them in H 311/313. There is also no space in H 311/313 for departmental staff.
5. The review team recommends that the college and university improve their support for and administration of external grants.
6. The review team recommends that the college and university do all they can to avoid cuts to the funds available for faculty's professional travel.

7. The review team recommends that the college and university do all they can to ensure that faculty salaries reflect increases in the cost of living. It is also recommended that the college and university do all they can to solve the problem of salary compression.

Submitted February 2013 by the Review Committee, consisting of Tim Black, Leila Zenderland, and Kathleen Higgins