



COLLEGE OF ARTS, HUMANITIES, AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES

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5 April 2021

TO: Sarah Shin, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs

FROM: Kimberly R. Moffitt, Interim Dean, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences *krm*

RE: Academic Program Review, Department of Philosophy (PHIL)

I have carefully reviewed the Self-Study for the Academic Program Review of the Department of Philosophy (PHIL) and the report of the External Reviewers. The Self-Study highlights the Department's strengths and challenges, and the report of the External Reviewers provides an insightful analysis and offers recommendations for how PHIL might move forward. I want to begin this report by stating my commitment to the Department and its role as an essential program at a public research university who bolsters a diverse student body. The presence of this disciplinary field and its course offerings are vital to a campus committed to writing excellence and critical thinking, as well as challenging the notions of how we understand the society around us.

### **Enrollment Data**

To provide context for the External Reviewers' report, I offer this data on enrollment in the Department:

Student numbers: Posted IRADS data for Fall 2020 indicate that the Department had 66 total majors (primary and additional plans) and 40 minors. The number of majors represents a 12% increase since Fall 2018 (F18=59, F19=56). The number of minors has increased by 14% over the same time period (F18=35). Overall, the Department has remained fairly constant in its majors and minors during the last three years since its Year Three Review (YTR).

Student-faculty ratios: As stated in Fall 2019 REX reports, the student-faculty ratio (SFR) for FTE students was 29.7 for full-time faculty, as against 18.0 for CAHSS; it was 23.0 for FTE faculty, as against 14.5 for CAHSS; and it was 39.6 for tenured/tenure-track FTE faculty, as against 25.0 for CAHSS. It is recognized that the Department has substantially higher ratios than those for CAHSS, which is commendable.

### **External Reviewers' Evaluation**

In their brief summary the External Reviewers provide a current state of the Department, including a review of the faculty and their research, an overview of the climate, and an assessment

of the undergraduate program offerings. They also acknowledge important aspects of PHIL's endeavors that are worthy of noting:

- "In general, the climate seems excellent. The Department reports that it makes many decisions by consensus...Moreover, everyone thinks well of UMBC and values its supportive climate and the excellent relationships between faculty and administration."
- "Associate Professors Steve Yalowitz and Jessica Pfeifer have done the bulk of Department service. They have rightly supported the research of their junior colleagues by giving them light service loads."
- "Teaching writing is very time-consuming, and the department is to be applauded for its dedication to this importance (sic) task. Helping students to develop good writing skills should be one of the most important pedagogical objectives of any University, as UMBC recognizes. Needless to say, the ability to write effectively has tremendous intellectual value, as well as tremendous practical value in most professions and in daily life."
- "...those students who do take advantage of one of the Certificate offerings do have an opportunity to achieve greater depth in their understanding of a specialize area of Philosophy...That combination of intellectual and practical opportunities makes the Certificates worthwhile already."

I will add to that last point raised by the External Reviewers that the five new Certificate offerings in the Department are indeed showing potential for continued success. This speaks specifically to efforts made to address recommendations made in the last APR, in 2013, in which the External Reviewers advised the Department to review its curriculum and consider mapping a 3-5 year course offering to attend to student needs. The Department has demonstrated its commitment to these concerns raised by students and implemented curriculum revisions that enhance their offerings.

A review of three Departmental proposals was provided along with considerations for moving forward. While aspects of this review may also arise in my discussion of the External Reviewers' recommendation, I share their assessments here for the Department to take into consideration as they continue future planning:

#### Proposal 1: A Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and Law Program (PPEL)

This program was seen as one in a stage of infancy. There appears to be tremendous interest among at least two faculty members in the Department, but the idea required further planning before pursuing. Additionally, this program could be mounted without significant, additional resources, however the External Reviewers suggested the consideration of a hire in the field of normative and applied ethics could enhance its potential.

#### Proposal 2: Revive the MA Program in Applied and Professional Ethics (MAPE)

The timing could be apt for reviving this MA Program although it would still require some retooling from the original concept to incorporate departmental strengths as well as contemporary issues in philosophy. The fact that no other area university offers such a graduate-

level program in ethics is encouraging and makes this idea novel. It was also noted, however, that additional faculty, specifically a colleague with seniority and leadership ability, would be necessary to garner the impact desired by such a program. (It is also noted that this faculty member might also be the hire to support Proposal 1 as well).

### Proposal 3: Expand ethics of STEM courses

The External Reviewers expressed concern about the teaching of “professional and STEM ethics in any field without some input from ethicists.” Yet, it appears that many of the STEM disciplines on campus have, in fact, chosen to teach such courses in house and not by our PHIL colleagues. To that end, the considerations of possible models to follow are advised. Specifically, it is important to continue conversations with those academic departments to discuss alternatives to teaching ethics by non-ethicists such as, team-taught courses and/or ensuring there is consultation with the Philosophy Department in the form of trainers who can thus guide or direct the structure of these courses. It may also be useful to hold a University-wide conversation with the Provost and the Deans regarding our standards related to teaching ethics. I concur with the Department that it is vital that ethicists are involved in teaching these courses, which may have direct implications on other majors outside of CAHSS. We must ensure that important elements of ethics are taught and not simply infused into tightly-structured, discipline-specific courses housed in COEIT or CNMS.

The External Reviewers also identify several major and minor recommendations that I will address. It should be noted that several of the recommendations are not distinct from one another and, in fact, tend to overlap one another in an effort to highlight important curricula shifts and potential staffing needs.

#### **Major recommendations:**

*The Department should be granted a hire in the area of normative and applied ethics at the senior assistant professor or higher level.*

Response: It is not possible to commit to such a hiring plan, at once, in view of recent budgetary challenges associated with the COVID-10 public health crisis. Moreover, while the recommendation highlights a specific area of focus, many of the proposals associated with this faculty position remain underdeveloped and/or in progress. As the Department makes strides to further develop their proposals of interest, an opportunity for additional faculty resources can be considered.

*The Department should address the fact that it does not offer courses in philosophy of race and gender.*

Response: This recommendation is again linked to the hiring of an additional faculty member with expertise in normative and applied ethics who might also have a skill set in race and gender issues. The External Reviewers acknowledge the capability, in the short term, of a colleague to address some aspects of these curricular needs, but note more attention should be given to this value, which remains important to the UMBC and CAHSS missions. I concur, but again, suggest that this idea be explored further when practicable.

*The Department should embrace its role as a leader in the teaching of clear analytic writing.*

Response: The Department currently has a strong reputation in developing critical writers among its majors as well as courses for non-majors. I concur that instituting more PHIL courses with a writing intensive designation could serve to attract more students who desire to fulfill the General Education Program (GEP) requirement, while also learning more about the offerings of the Department. Additionally, the Center for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) might prove useful here in assessing the outcomes of the writing courses and the skills and strategies used to effectively teach writing.

*The two senior associate professors (Steve Yalowitz and Jessica Pfeifer) who have done so much service and rebuilt the department deserve support in the form of teaching releases to return to their research and make progress towards promotion to full professor.*

Response: Both colleagues are to be commended for their commitment to the Department and their junior colleagues. At the same time, it is important that we now support them should they desire to pursue promotion to full professor –a goal I encourage to ensure that the task of departmental leadership is not dependent upon our associate professors. Initiatives in the Provost’s Office such as the “On-Ramps” program, specifically for associate professors who have languished at rank for a number of years because of service commitments, are now in place and should be considered by both colleagues.

*We were told that it is the tradition at UMBC and in the Philosophy Department to try to convert long-term adjunct professors into full-time lecturers. This does show respect for the hard work of poorly compensated part-timers and is a humane response to the nationwide problem of adjunctification of faculty. However, it is also arguable that full-time positions—even temporary ones--should result only from a nationwide search, in the interests of both diversity and academic excellence.*

Response: Such conversions should still be done with consideration of a national search to ensure curricula needs and expertise are met. This is a discussion within the Department regarding how to proceed with lecturer positions, but one that the Dean’s Office is willing to assist with to support the Department. Such commitments are not currently under consideration but will be necessary as the Department makes decisions about moving forward with desired proposals.

*We suggest that the Department try earlier outreach efforts, such as advertising in introductory courses, events for interested undergraduates (e.g., First Friday pizza lunches), letters of encouragement to students doing well in their first philosophy courses, putting up posters depicting diversity in Philosophy from the APA Committee on the Status of Women, etc.*

Response: As with many CAHSS departments, PHIL is a major often selected by students later in their academic program. The recommendations of the External Reviewers are a starting point as it is imperative that all of our departments consider ways to reach and attract students sooner to the major. The Strategic Enrollment Plan (SEP) is another university-wide initiative with

goals of guiding and implementing additional means to drive enrollment. Some of these recommended tasks are counter to the ways in which we have attracted students previously, which has created tension around how to proceed. One specific recommendation of the SEP is to utilize our faculty in more prominent ways to engage prospective students. While faculty, including myself, have never seen our role as recruiters, the shift in what students desire has. And for many of them, the interpersonal connection to faculty, or research opportunities with faculty, or even learning directly from faculty about their research is a draw, which we should now capitalize upon. PHIL has much to offer the campus, as noted by current students, and efforts should now be considered by the faculty (with assistance) to highlight the tremendous work of the faculty to continue drawing students to the major.

### **Minor recommendations:**

I share two points to address the minor recommendations made by the External Reviewers;

- The consideration of including lecturers in Department governance seems to already be embedded in the climate of the Department. And while I support this inclusive environment, I do think it important to be careful of adding responsibilities to our lecturers who are tasked with teaching several courses a semester for the Department. An expectation of service may be construed as an additional burden to faculty members. University guidelines outline the roles and responsibilities for faculty positions of which service is situated in the tenured, tenure-track positions. Any faculty member who selects to do service in the Department should not be prohibited, but nor should they be expected. In addition to the Faculty Handbook, this should be explicitly clear in the Department by-laws.
- Several recommendations were raised by students who desired to see additional course offerings, student activities, and research opportunities. I encourage the Department to consider these. Most were not requests that require more resources, but may, in fact, necessitate additional time of faculty members. As the Department continues its decision making regarding new proposals, the recommendations of the students should also be discussed and incorporated. It is clear the Department has cultivated a vibrant and supportive climate for students (as they have for the faculty) and any enhancements to Department offerings should include those that continue to promote student opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

The Philosophy Department at UMBC has seen numerous changes since its last APR. A new department space in the Performing Arts and Humanities Building, increase tenure-track faculty, and the addition of certificate programs to enhance its curriculum. This important humanities department exemplifies the mission of the University to embody inclusive excellence while also preparing our students to be engaged, critical citizens of our society. I see this timely APR as a moment of opportunity for the Department to contemplate its next evolution. There are several recommendations made in this report that raise key considerations about how the Department plans to enhance its offerings and solidify its role as a leader in teaching ethics and cultivating

stronger writers. Beyond a focus on increasing the number of faculty in the Department, efforts should be made to fully develop plans for the programs proposed to ensure viability and the impact on students. With the present faculty, I am excited about the possibilities in store, and I look forward to working with the Department in the next phase of this process.

cc: Steve Yalowitz, Chair, Philosophy