

# **External Review for UMBC Department of Philosophy, October 18-20, 2020**

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## **A. CURRENT STATE OF THE DEPARTMENT**

### Introduction

The UMBC Philosophy Department's last APR was in 2012. At that time, it had just two tenured associate professors and one lecturer, a huge drop from its previous level of nine tenure-track/tenured faculty. Since that time, with the support of UMBC and the leadership of Chair Steve Yalowitz and Associate Professor Jessica Pfeifer, the Department has built up again. It now has four tenured associate professors, two tenure track assistant professors, one postdoctoral diversity fellow and two full time lecturers, as well as several adjuncts. This is a major accomplishment. The Department has made excellent faculty hires and restored its vitality. The Department also has an excellent new administrator. It is a good time now to think about how rebuilding can continue, in ways that fit the culture of UMBC and reflect the progress of the discipline of philosophy.

### Mission

The Department's teaching mission is to offer undergraduate philosophy courses across the curriculum, satisfying the needs of both philosophy majors and non-philosophy majors. The Department wants to add to this mission by (1) creating an interdisciplinary program in Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and Law (PPEL) for undergraduates, (2) reviving a Master's program in Applied and Professional Ethics (MAPE) that has been inactive for over ten years, and (3) positioning itself in the university as the locus for applied ethics teaching, especially in STEM fields.

The Department also has a research mission, consistent with UMBC's classification as a Carnegie R2 level university. Tenure-track and tenured faculty are expected to do research and have a 2-3 teaching load, which is reasonable.

### Facilities

The Department is housed in the new Performing Arts and Humanities Building. Faculty are very happy with their office space but find the classrooms in the building to be too small for some classes. However, they can walk to larger classrooms in other buildings. Thus, it appears that the department's needs in terms of facilities are well-met.

### Administration

Since the Spring of 2019, Ms. Vanessa Capuano has been the Department Administrative Assistant. Department members are enthusiastic about her contributions and expertise, and she is happy in her position.

### Service

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. This should change, however, as their junior colleagues are tenured and promoted.

### Climate

In general, the climate seems excellent. The Department reports that it makes many decisions by consensus. Everyone—including adjuncts—feels respected and valued for their contributions. For example, one adjunct told us, “The Department is exceptionally humane in its treatment of part-timers.” Mentoring of junior faculty and diversity postdocs by tenured faculty is excellent. Moreover, everyone thinks well of UMBC and values its supportive climate and the excellent relationships between faculty and administration.

### Faculty Research

We met (by Webex) separately with each member of the postdoctoral, tenure-track and tenured faculty. The postdoc (Blake Francis), junior faculty (Lisa Cassell and Eric Campbell) and two recently tenured faculty (Michael Nance and Whitney Schwab) are all publishing successfully both in terms of number of publications and quality of venue. Michael Nance received a Humboldt Fellowship and Whitney Schwab an NEH Fellowship to support their research. These are very competitive and prestigious awards. Junior faculty appreciate their light service loads, which facilitates their research productivity. The two senior associate professors (Jessica Pfeifer and Steve Yalowitz) have published in excellent venues early in their careers, but quite understandably have not been able to publish much over the last decade because they have done so much (departmental, university, and professional) service and so much mentoring of junior faculty. Faculty are happy with the financial support they receive for their research, such as travel support for attending conferences.

## Undergraduate Programs

The Philosophy Department offers a major and minor in philosophy. These have typical requirements in logic, history of philosophy, ethics, and metaphysics/epistemology. The number of majors ranges from 45-63, and the number of minors from 23-44.

There are also five new Certificate offerings which offer focused study in specialized fields, especially for students not majoring or minoring in philosophy. These Certificate offerings are in History of Philosophy; Philosophy, Law, and Politics; Philosophy of Mind and Psychology; Philosophy, Logic, and Science; and Philosophy, Ethics and Value. It is too early to tell whether the Certificate offerings will increase the number of enrollments in philosophy courses. But 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 specialized area of Philosophy. They also have something they can use to enhance graduate school and job applications in fields related to their chosen theme. That combination of intellectual and practical opportunities makes the Certificates worthwhile already.

There is a good range of courses, although courses in philosophy of race and gender are not currently offered and should be added, as they are important new areas in philosophy and contribute to diversifying the curriculum.

The Philosophy Department's teaching is, mostly, to students not in its major or minor programs, and this should be considered when assessing teaching needs (i.e. it is probably better to focus on total credit hours offered than simply on the number of majors and minors when considering the Department's teaching contributions). One or more philosophy courses can enrich the undergraduate curriculum for students in a wide variety of programs and teach all students skills at critical thinking, clear writing, and ethical reasoning that are widely applicable.

At all levels, the Department takes seriously its role in teaching clear and critical writing. All courses (except for formal courses like Logic), even the most introductory ones, have a significant writing component. Teaching writing is very time-consuming, and the department is to be applauded for its dedication to this importance 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.

## Lecturers and Adjuncts

Some of the Department's teaching is done by full time lecturers and adjuncts. Lecturers typically have a 4:4 teaching load. There are two full time lecturers, who were previously adjuncts. The Department, and UMBC, have a policy of trying to promote long-term adjuncts to full time lectureships. We spoke to most of these faculty, and they all said that they feel their teaching is valued by the Department.

## **B. DEPARTMENT'S PROPOSALS**

In the "Future Directions" section of its self-study, the Philosophy Department has identified three projects for its next phase of development (the next 3-7 years). Each of them is aligned with the University's stated goals and objectives as formulated in its strategic plan. The Department believes that each of them can be effectively implemented only if the Department receives new resources in terms of faculty hires (preferably several, but at least one hire in the area of normative and applied ethics). We would like to comment on the value of each proposal, their alignment with the University's strategic plan, and the extent to which they support the department's call for additional resources.

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

The Philosophy Department is interested in the development of a Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and Law program. It is our impression that this project is still in its infancy. The other UMBC departments that would need to agree to be involved with such a program have not yet been presented with any proposal and their buy-in is essential. Moreover, any role that the Carey School of Law might play in such a program has not yet been discussed with any representative of that school. But the Department's plan to explore the possibility is a very reasonable one, partly because of the interest some of its junior members have in participating in such a program, and also because of the enormous success such programs have had on other campuses, such as the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Arizona, and the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill). Moreover, such a program would be very much aligned with the University's strategic objectives in terms of fostering collaborative and multidisciplinary scholarship, research and educational programs.

In our discussions with the members of the faculty, we tried to assess the level of interest in the development of such a program, especially among junior faculty whose teaching and research trajectories might be substantially affected by a departmental decision to pursue a PPEL program. Strong interest in the program was expressed by two faculty members, Michael Nance (Associate Professor) and Eric Campbell (Assistant Professor). No opposition to the development of such a program was expressed by anyone. Michael Nance, who appears to be the driving force behind the plan, expressed interest in the collaborative opportunities such a program would facilitate.

In terms of resources, it appears that the program could be developed without further investments in terms of hires in Philosophy. However, given that the connections between Philosophy and Economics, Political Science and Law are to a great extent normative ones, an additional hire in the field of normative and applied ethics would be extremely useful to a PPEL program. Because such a hire would be crucial to meeting the other goals the department has for its next stage of development (see below), there is a possibility of accomplishing multiple goals with a carefully targeted hire.

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

The Department would like to revive its MA program in Applied and Professional Ethics (MAPE). This is an exciting prospect, and we think there will be a market for such a degree. The degree may require reorienting a bit from its original conception in order to address more current issues and themes in philosophy and to take advantage of new strengths in the Department. Public philosophy (philosophy addressing public issues in non-technical terms for general audiences) is a growing and exciting field that incorporates applied ethics but also other areas in philosophy. We think that the Department's idea to include applied philosophy more generally (especially including applied epistemology, which takes advantage of the specializations of Lisa Cassell and Jessica Pfeifer) is novel. Perhaps it could be renamed as an MA program in Applied Philosophy and Public Policy (MAPP), or even Applied Ethics and Public Philosophy (MAEPP, which would still be pronounced the same way as (MAPE!).

What the Department still needs to get such a program off the ground is some leadership in normative and applied ethics. Postdoctoral Fellow Blake Francis works in these areas (specifically in environmental philosophy) and in due course may have much to contribute to this proposed MA degree. Assistant Professor Eric Campbell works more in the area of metaethics than normative and applied ethics but expressed interest in contributing to this degree. At this time, however, there is a clear need for a tenure-line, preferably tenured, scholar who would give the leadership and the time to revive and direct this program. This could be a current faculty member or, ideally, a new hire in normative and applied ethics—the same suggestion as for the PPEL program. Any prestige a more senior hire could bring to the program would also be a distinct advantage.

### Proposal 3: Expand ethics of STEM courses

The Philosophy Department would like to position itself in the University as a resource for professional and applied ethics. Ethics is a branch of philosophy. We agree with the Department that it is ill-advised to teach professional and STEM ethics in any field without some input from ethicists. In particular, it is not a good idea to have professional and STEM ethics courses taught “in house” by professors with no training in ethics, although this is often happening these days, especially in universities that have embraced RCM (Responsibility Centered Management) budgetary models. Fortunately, UMBC does not have such a budgetary model (its three colleges, including CAHSS, have traditional Incremental Budgeting). Thus, it is able to use the expertise of the Philosophy Department in creating ethics courses across the curriculum. Possible models are: (1) courses taught entirely by Philosophy faculty who have preparation in relevant areas of applied ethics (2) team-taught courses---combining an ethicist and an expert in the relevant other field--whether computer science/data studies, STEM, business, etc. (3) courses devised in consultation with the Philosophy Department, with ongoing training of instructors provided by the Philosophy Department.

The University is committed to producing graduates who have been prepared to think critically about questions of value so that they can effectively participate in civic life as engaged citizens. Thus, the University does a disservice to its students if it does not provide instructors with expertise in the field of Ethics to teach its ethics courses.

A new tenure-track/tenured hire in normative and applied ethics would be helpful for this proposal as well as for Proposal 1 and Proposal 2. They could provide leadership in teaching in this area. Such an approach is preferable to the common strategy of only hiring adjuncts to teach these courses because it improves the quality and the consistency of teaching. Adjuncts play an important role but are not positioned to do this kind of teaching leadership across the applied ethics curriculum. Lecturers may be able to contribute to teaching leadership if they are promoted to senior lecturers with time released from teaching for administration.

### C. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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.* This is our most important recommendation. A single hire has the potential to facilitate *all three* of the promising new initiatives proposed by the Department. Because FTE calculations indicate the department has fewer faculty than other departments do for the same number of student credits, this would be a fair request even in the absence of these new initiatives. The importance of such a hire to all three of them makes the case for granting it extremely strong.
- *The Department should address the fact that it does not offer courses in philosophy of race and gender.* This is our second most important recommendation. These new areas of philosophy are essential to diversifying the curriculum, which UMBC is committed to. Although some faculty members (e.g. Michael Nance) incorporate issues of race and gender into their syllabi, this is not prevalent, and overall, not sufficient. The best way to address this lacuna would be to do the search in normative and applied ethics (as discussed in the previous recommendation) while also specifying that the candidate should have some expertise in philosophy of race and/or gender. This should not be difficult to do, since the strongest PhD programs are now producing graduates with this training. Such a hire would contribute to all three new initiatives (PPEL, MAPE, and ethics of STEM courses) by helping to diversify the curriculum. There is also a role for adjuncts and lecturers in teaching philosophy of gender and race, but leadership from tenure-track and tenured faculty is essential for taking these fields of philosophy seriously.
- *The Department should embrace its role as a leader in the teaching of clear analytic writing.* The Department is exemplary in terms of teaching writing, even in its introductory courses. The undergraduates we spoke with would like some Writing Intensive classes in Philosophy. We were surprised to find that currently no Philosophy courses are Writing Intensive. Undergraduates think this would attract more students who need such a class to philosophy. Since philosophy classes regularly require much writing, this should not require much modification of existing courses. We also recommend that

mentorship of faculty include, as a crucial element, discussions of how to effectively teach writing. We do not know the extent to which such mentorship already exists, but we believe its importance warrants mention nonetheless. We also recommend that the department use (or develop, if necessary) outcome assessment measures specifically targeted at providing useful information about how to most effectively teaching 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.
- 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. There is also a downside to hiring lecturers rather than tenure-track and tenured faculty, because lecturers do not (at present) contribute to Department governance, leadership, research, or diversity. We recommend focusing on tenure-track and tenured searches. We also recommend that, in the future, lecturers should be hired as a result of a national search.
- The number of majors and minors in Philosophy at UMBC is at expected levels, consistent with nationwide trends. There are approximately twice the number of men as women majoring in Philosophy, also consistent with nationwide trends. Philosophy as a major and minor tend to be undersubscribed because students do not find out about the existence of the subject and its value until well into their undergraduate careers. 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. Continued efforts from the Departmental Women Interested in Philosophy (WIP) group are also important. It might even be worthwhile for the department to have a recruitment committee tasked with developing and implementing recruitment efforts. The aim of recruiting more majors is a very important one. In our conversations with students, some of them talked about how they stumbled upon Philosophy, but now absolutely adore it. Others emphasized how valuable they regard the Philosophy major in terms of the writing, reasoning, and critical thinking skills it has helped them to develop. One student decried the fact that most UMBC students are ignorant of the value of majoring in Philosophy. We think UMBC students are done a disservice if they have no real opportunity to choose to major in Philosophy because they didn't happen to stumble upon it.

Minor recommendations:

- Consider giving lecturers some role in Department governance. They are full-time employees who typically spend many years in the department and they have a stake in many departmental decisions.
- The undergraduate philosophy society, PhilAnon, would like some funding from the Philosophy Department for creating a journal and for snacks etc. (student activities money is insufficient and unpredictable).
- Undergraduates would like more philosophy events—not just the annual Barker colloquium in the spring—and they think that these would bring in more students to the philosophy major.
- Some faculty would like more faculty discussion groups: at least two per semester.
- Undergraduate students expressed an interest in doing research *with* professors, as research assistants. They did not seem to be aware of the University's Undergraduate Research Assistants Support (URAS) program. Faculty should be encouraged to participate in this program.
- Undergraduates would like non-Western philosophy offerings e.g. Buddhism. Finding someone who can teach Asian or Eastern Philosophy would add to the intellectual diversity of the Department's curricula and fulfill a demand that exists for such diversity.