

Philosophy Program Review

Response to Reviewer's Comments

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Overview

We are grateful to the reviewers for their time, effort, and exceedingly gracious and helpful comments. We are especially pleased to see that the reviewers recognize our recent efforts in developing a capstone portfolio as well as our ongoing commitment to outreach and interdisciplinary initiatives.

The reviewers note two challenges for the program. Growing administrative burdens, particularly with respect to assessment, result in less faculty ability to focus on students and teaching. The program coordinator's role has grown to include the bulk of the work of the chair, and while the release time was increased from a 1 course/year to 1 course/semester, the work has outpaced the compensation. Second, diversity, equity, and inclusion remain a challenge for a discipline that is, according to the American Philosophical Association overwhelmingly white and male.

We agree that with the reviewers that philosophy faces these structural challenges. As the reviews have acknowledged in conversation, we cannot do much directly about the rising flood of required assessment. Political Science and Philosophy are a joint department. The chair manages the department and serves as de facto coordinator for their home program (historically political science), and the program coordinator coordinates the other program (historically philosophy). In 2022, it is anticipated that a philosopher will become chair, which partially solves the problem of the program coordinator's burden, albeit by shifting it to the new political science. So here, we join with the reviewers in imploring the administration to ease or streamline assessment. The primary focus of faculty needs to be teaching. We address the challenge and opportunity of increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the next section.

The reviewers noted two weaknesses. First, our special topics courses rotation is not planned far in advance of the semester. Second, they would like to see better integrations and improvement of our outcomes and learning parameters. I will respond to these in the next section.

Response to Specific Recommendations

1. Create and publicize course offerings at least two years out, with special topics courses specified:

Our response: All of our core and regularly-taught electives are taught in a publicized, two-year rotation. It is possible for a student to complete their degree only with these regularly offered class. The issue that the reviewers identify is with PHIL 4400. PHIL 4400 is a variable-title course that has historically allowed faculty to teach one-off courses in their area

of interest, or to develop new upper-division courses that then become part of the curriculum. A faculty gets a 'choice' class (usually resulting in a PHIL 4400 offering, but sometimes an Honors course) periodically, but typically the topic isn't determined until the prior semester when the schedule is set. Topics might be decided based on faculty's current research interests, or by surveying current students to see what they might like to study further.

When we were a department of three full-time faculty, we regularly used PHIL 4400 to add variety to the curriculum. With the addition of our fourth line, we have been able to commit to teaching a broader variety of courses as part of our regular rotation. For example, Environmental Philosophy and Philosophy of Mind both started as PHIL 4400 courses, and now are part of the regularly taught rotation. We expect that Philosophy of Race and Gender will soon follow suit.

As a result, we anticipate that PHIL 4400 will become a less utilized option. We have fewer 'choice' slots than we used to. I think that we can follow the spirit of the reviewers' recommendation by **ensuring that particularly successful variable-title offerings are converted to regular elective courses**, but the faculty wish to keep the flexibility of PHIL 4400.

2. Integrate and Improve Learning Outcomes

The reviewers noted a disconnect between our general education outcomes, our program outcomes, our program's mission statement, and the new (September 2021) university-wide strategic plan. The latter was published shortly before our program review, and we will revise our mission statement in the next year to bring it in line with Weber's new direction and foci.

The reviewers suggest that although the learning outcomes map well to program goals, and that the capstone and introductory courses are regularly and competently assessed, we lack formalized methods for assessing learning outcomes. **As we intend to revise our program goals – our strategic plan covered only three years – we will adjust the outcomes as needed and develop corresponding assessment tools.** We expect to do this during AY 2022-2023.

3. Bring the program mission statement into line with more contemporary understandings of diversity and equity, specifically the university's recent focus on serving the Hispanic community.

Our current mission statement focused on the challenge within philosophy, which nationwide as a discipline is overwhelmingly white and male. We had been focusing on gender equity for a few reasons. First, our focus was our upper division classes. As our major is small, small fluctuations in student demographics (such as the successful graduation of a Hispanic student) lead to large statistical swings. Second, gender is close to parity in our introductory classes and improving in our upper division classes; we thought there was more obvious room for improvement (and greater ability to measure improvement.) Some of the tracking has been helpful. We've noted that philosophy inherits some of its challenges with gender diversity from computer science, which skews male and includes PHIL 1250 (Critical Thinking) as a recommended elective.

We agree, however, that given the university's new mission statement, we need to attend diversity and equity beyond gender. We approve of the suggestion **to revise the program's mission statement and strategic plan to include DEI outcomes, and to measure diversity and equity along numerous axes.** The suggestion to focus on general education courses – PHIL 1000, PHIL 1120, and PHIL 1250 – is welcome, as we believe that will give us a better sense of who philosophy attracts, and whom it might inadvertently exclude. We expect to do this during AY 2022-2023.

Short Responses to Other Comments:

Standard B.c: We are indeed grateful for the fourth line, which has had immediate impact on the breadth of our regular upper-division courses, and for the continued support of the dean and administration.

Standard C.g: The capstone portfolio is relatively new to the program, and we are looking forward to improving it and integrating it into upper division courses.

Standard F.a: Advising within philosophy is generally regarded as very good by our students. We have a very clear and easy-to-navigate degree map and accessible faculty, which takes care of most questions. (See D.a) Students reported their perception that academic advising has been less successful at the college level. The college advisors individually are great, but they are badly overworked and sometimes it is hard to schedule a time, especially during peak seasons.

Standard G.a.: With the COVID pandemic winding down, we hope to reinvigorate our community-focused programming. Two ethics slams (open mic community ethics discussions) already resumed in person this spring.

Independently, we hope to increase interdisciplinary connections and teaching. We thank the review committee again for their work and recommendations. Please contact Mary Beth Willard (marybethwillard@weber.edu) for clarifications and/or more information.