

Program Review 2022

Name of program under review: Philosophy

Name of reviewers: Jenny Kokai and Chris Weigel

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Overview

The philosophy department exhibits many strengths. Students are educated with a challenging curriculum in a welcoming atmosphere. The department does particularly well with advising; students feel like they know all the faculty and that everyone supports their success. This is due to a second strength: the faculty members themselves (including adjunct). They are highly trained academics with active research agendas who are committed to teaching well. They have worked together to bring about a third strength: the capstone portfolio. Students engage in meaningful, original research, synthesizing what they have learned throughout the major. Finally, we commend the department on its interdisciplinary work and its outreach, which draw impactful connections to other disciplines and to the community at large.

Two challenges present themselves. First, administrative creep is negatively impacting the department's ability to focus on students and on teaching. The program coordinator does most of the same work that a chair does, but without adequate release time or support. Moreover, faculty are increasingly asked to generate reports, which detracts from time engaged with students. Second, diversity, equity, and inclusion are a challenge. Much of this is inherited from the discipline at large, which has lower rates of diversity than many other disciplines. The philosophy area suffers from the same factors that affect society at large.

Two weaknesses, additionally, are present. First, students are not adequately able to plan their courses because a special topics course rotation is not sufficiently publicized. Second, outcomes and learning parameters need to be integrated and improved.

As a result, we have three primary recommendations. First, create and publicize course offerings at least two years out, with special topics courses specified. Second, integrate and

improve learning outcomes. Third, work on diversity and inclusion more holistically, rather than trying to separate out one element at a time and improve on that.

Our overall evaluation of the philosophy department is highly positive. They have hired an additional faculty member based on the last program review; this hire has allowed them to expand on their existing strengths, which are considerable. We are confident that these additional recommendations will strengthen this outstanding department even more.

Details

STANDARD A - MISSION STATEMENT

- a. The program coordinator has well-defined outcomes in mind. These outcomes (or similar ones) should be made into the official program outcomes. They should be made consistent across the various rubrics as well.
- b. The capstone and general education are assessed thoroughly and regularly.
- c. The course structure indicates where and how mastery is achieved for each element in the mission.
- d. Bring the program mission statement into line with more contemporary understandings of diversity and equity, particularly in who general education classes are serving (the data on who takes general education courses can be acquired from Institutional Research including age, race, gender, etc.). Gender diversity is important but the University mission asks us to go beyond that and especially to pay attention to LatinX populations.

STANDARD B - CURRICULUM

- a. Assessment of the capstone class as well as student feedback demonstrate that the curriculum is carefully constructed and monitored for its success. General education classes could perhaps use a more frequent review to make sure they align with university mission.
- b. The curriculum offers classes that support the three learning outcomes and lead to the capstone which synthesizes the outcomes.
- c. The fourth line has clearly made the program better able to offer their curriculum in a regular fashion.
- d. Publicize the course rotation and special topics courses two years out and make them more specific to aid students with planning.

STANDARD C - STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

- a. See A.a. The unofficial expected outcomes need to be made formal and official.
- b. The students and faculty make it clear that the learning outcomes serve the constituencies and map well to the program goals.
- c. A curriculum grid is included with all classes mapped.
- d. The learning outcomes need to map more clearly to measures of assessment. They need a rubric or explanation. The thresholds are not clear.
- e. No acceptable performance parameters are indicated for learning outcomes.
- f. The program assessment procedures and focus are clear and effective.
- g. The capstone approach asks students to use work from a variety of classes and professors, and students seem supported by all faculty in the construction of their portfolios.
- h. Diversity and equity do currently drive program change. Courses are planned with a careful eye to diversity and equity. As noted above, we encourage a more holistic approach to diversity and equity. Rather than focusing on distinct populations in a piecemeal fashion, we are encouraging the program to focus on multiple elements of diversity simultaneously. It is likely that this will more clearly expose existing strengths (e.g., it is possible that the program is better than the university as a whole in terms of religious diversity and diversity surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity), which might in turn aid with remediating weaknesses.

STANDARD D - ACADEMIC ADVISING

- a. Students speak highly of faculty advising and accessibility.
- b. Students feel that all faculty are accessible and helpful in planning their programs of study. They are less enthusiastic about the college advisors. They also speak about wanting specialized topic seminars publicized well in advance to better plan their schedules around. While it can be difficult to commit to a special topic two or three years in advance, it would be worth trying to see if it could be done for students.
- c. The program has a good graduate placement rate, especially given that WSU students are not necessarily always interested in graduate degrees. It is clear that faculty are respectful of individual students' directions but supportive in helping them take the next step in their careers if desired.

STANDARD E – FACULTY

- a. The department has recently increased to four tenure-track people, which they are pleased with. This is sufficient to serve the student population and to allow for regular rotation of classes.

- b. The additional hire has allowed the department to offer a more diverse array of courses while also doing more interdisciplinary work.
- c. The program is lucky to benefit from highly qualified and excellent adjuncts, many of whom hold Ph.D.s.
- d. The program lacks racial diversity and is largely male, which reflects issues within the discipline itself. While it is difficult to attract diverse candidates to Utah, we encourage them to keep pursuing diversity efforts in the future.
- e. We did not have an opportunity to meet with adjunct faculty.
- f. Administrative creep is demanding more and is making the department lack sufficient support to fulfill its mission. The area head of Philosophy is essentially doing nearly the entire job of a chair, historically for very little reassigned time for this administrative work. Continual escalation on reports, strategic plans, and other things from upper administration are negatively impacting faculty ability to focus on students and teaching, a common issue across the university but one administration ought to give more thought to.
- g. The department engages in course evaluations, peer reviews, and portfolio evaluations. RTP policies are consistent and clear. Adjunct faculty are also reviewed annually.
- h. Faculty go through a review at 3 and 6 years and then can go up for full at 11. Regular post tenure reviews occur.

STANDARD F - PROGRAM SUPPORT

- a. Advising is a broader institutional issue. The library is fine. Administrative assistance fine.
- b. Philosophy faculty participate in hiring committees for support staff.
- c. The librarian was invested and interested in the Philosophy program's success. He does ask that faculty help guide him in purchases more regularly.

STANDARD G - RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXTERNAL COMMUNITIES

- a. The Philosophy program does a superb job connecting with the community through a variety of interesting and innovative programs like ethics bowl, Richard Richards program, and other outwardly focused programming.
- b. Because few students come to college with any awareness of what philosophy is, a primary role of engaging with external communities is to bring awareness. These relationships have demonstrated success in fulfilling that role as evidenced by the number of community members who participate.
- c. The program does not have an external advisory committee.

STANDARD H - PROGRAM SUMMARY

- a. The previous review recommended a fourth tenure line, which was implemented. This has allowed them to pursue interdisciplinary courses and honors courses.