



**Undergraduate Programs in Philosophy
Final Assessment Report**

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Arts and Humanities
Degrees Offered	Bachelor of Arts
Modules Reviewed	Honours Specialization in Philosophy Major in Philosophy Specialization in Philosophy
External Consultants	Dr. Emer O'Hagan, Associate Professor; Department of Philosophy, University of Saskatchewan Dr. Jack Zupko, Chair and Professor; Department of Philosophy, University of Alberta
Internal Reviewer	Dr. Michael Bartlett, Professor and Associate Dean (Undergraduate Studies); Faculty of Engineering, Western University
Date of Site Visit	26 February 2018
Evaluation	Good quality with report in two years.
Approval Dates	SUPR-U: April 25, 2018 SCAPA: May 2, 2018 Senate: May 11, 2018

Executive Summary

Dr. Botterell, the Chair of the Department, summarized key aspects of the Department's appraisal document. The current ranking of the Department among the top 50 philosophy departments in the world was gently emphasized, and the construction of the undergraduate curriculum around four key areas (History of Philosophy, Metaphysics and Epistemology, Moral/Political/Legal Philosophy and Logic) was highlighted. The creation of the Rotman Institute of Philosophy in 2008 was described, and the impact of the current plan to move faculty who are members of the Institute to the new Western Interdisciplinary Research Building, and so free up space in Stevenson Hall for undergraduate student use, was discussed. The declining undergraduate enrollment in Philosophy was also discussed: both External Reviewers commented that similar declines are occurring at their home institutions.

The online site visit began at 8:30 am on 26th February with Dr. John Doerksen, Vice-Provost (Academic Programs) and Dr. Karen Campbell, Vice-Provost (Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty), who commented on the high quality of Western undergraduate students in general and their excellent academic preparedness. They identified the enrollment challenge – a drop of approximately one-third in ten years in Arts and Humanities - and its impact on the Faculty budget. These circumstances were raised again in the meeting with Dr. Michael Milde, Dean; and Dr. Tracy Isaacs, Associate Dean (Academic): who described how budget uncertainty is a factor in the reduction of the number of part-time instructors and making it difficult to replace retiring professors, particularly in the History of Philosophy field.

The rest of the visit included one-on-one meetings with Professors Smeenk, Desjardins, Thorp, Hill, Klimchuk, McLeod, and Skelton; a meeting with both the Undergraduate Chair, Devin Henry, and the Undergraduate Assistant, Sarah Murdoch; a meeting with three current undergraduate students; and a meeting with Associate Chief Librarian, Jennifer Robinson. These various meetings provided the Reviewers with relevant information described in the External Consultants' Report and is summarized in the following sections on significant strengths and suggestions for improvement of the program.

Significant Strengths of the Program

Specific strengths of the program identified by the External Reviewers are as follows:

- The Philosophy Department has “a deservedly distinguished reputation”, recognized by the Reviewers as “the most interdisciplinary philosophy department in Canada by a long stretch, and perhaps the entire world”.
- “The Philosophy BA from Western is a very good degree.” Both reviewers commented informally on the success of Philosophy graduates from Western in graduate studies programs at their home institutions. They stress “we believe that Western Philosophy students are receiving a high quality undergraduate education.”
- “The students... assess the program positively and the professors in particular very highly.”
- “The curriculum successfully addresses the current state of the discipline” with courses “taught by experts in the field. Because the faculty is so research intensive, their teaching will be shaped by the latest developments.”
- “The requirements for all Philosophy programs offered are clear and appropriate. Expected learning outcomes coordinate well with undergraduate degree level expectations.”

Suggestions for Improvement & Enhancement

The External Reviewers have identified the following specific opportunities for improvement that, if implemented, would improve this program:

1. The need to enhance the sense of community among undergraduates was identified by the External Reviewers and by the Department's self-study document. The External Reviewers recommend:
 - a. immediately establishing “a dedicated office and lounge space for undergraduate Majors and Honours students” and that “students be given control over the space, e.g., by allowing them to decorate it themselves”;
 - b. supporting Philosophy Club activities using a “small discretionary budget” controlled by the Undergraduate Chair;
 - c. personally inviting Majors, and Honours students, and Philosophy Club members to colloquia and other academic events, and have them be greeted by faculty members when they attend; and,
 - d. appointing a faculty member to serve as a liaison to the Philosophy Club.
2. The appointment of an Undergraduate Curriculum Task Force to review the degree requirements including:
 - a. developing and disseminating a Departmental policy on reading courses;
 - b. developing a required 4000-level research thesis course for Honours students;
 - c. ensuring that difficulties perceived by students to satisfy degree requirements are resolved; and
 - d. developing new and exciting, or “fun” courses that would attract students to Philosophy (two of the three students met by the reviewers transferred to Philosophy from other disciplines).

3. The creation of a small Undergraduate Affairs Committee to replace the current committee consisting of all full-time faculty members that meets as a committee of the whole. This committee should:
 - a. review the long-term viability of the Honours Specialization (HSP) program, particularly in the core areas of History of Philosophy, and Moral/Political/Legal Philosophy, where, as noted in the self-study, faculty resources are being depleted; and,
 - b. consider ways to distinguish the HSP programs from the Major programs.

Dr. Devon Henry, Associate Chair of the Department of Philosophy, acknowledges in his response to the External Consultants report that the Department has had “several retirements and resignations without replacements, the cumulative effect of which threatens the integrity of our undergraduate program.” He notes that “at least two of the core areas vital to the integrity of the undergraduate program are under threat: History of Philosophy and Moral/Political/Legal (MPL) Philosophy”. He also makes strong cases for maintaining these programs, noting that “History of Philosophy is integral to the foundations of our discipline”, and “reducing the number of MPL courses would have a serious impact on our enrollment numbers.”

Recommendations Required for Program Sustainability

Recommendation	Responsibility
Create a Curriculum Task Force to review and revise degree requirements as appropriate.	Chair, Undergraduate Chair
Rectify imbalance of demands/resources in the History of Philosophy and Moral/Political/Legal Philosophy fields	Chair, Dean
Enhance the sense of community among undergraduates	Chair, Associate Chair