# Philosophy
## Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
## May 2026

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| **Faculty / Affiliated University College** | Faculty of Arts and Humanities | |
| **Degrees Offered** | M.A., PhD | |
| **Date of Last Review** | 2017-2018 | |
| **Approved Fields** | Feminist Philosophy;<br>History of Philosophy;<br>Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy;<br>Philosophy of Mind & Language;<br>Philosophy of Science | |
| **External Reviewers** | Dr. Jennifer Saul,<br>Professor, Department of Philosophy<br>University of Waterloo | Dr. Susanna Schellenberg<br>Professor, Department of Philosophy<br>Rutgers University |
| **Internal Reviewers** | Dr. Ankush Agarwal<br>Associate Professor,<br>Department of Statistical and Actuarial Sciences | Haojin Deng,<br>PhD Candidate, Electrical and Computer Engineering |
| **Date of Site Visit** | January 28 and 29, 2026 | |
| **Date Review Report Received** | February 22, 2026 | |
| **Date Program/Faculty Response Received** | Program Response: March 27, 2026<br>Faculty Response: March 30, 2026 | |
| **Evaluation** | Good Quality | |
| **Approval Dates** | SUPR-G: June 15, 2026<br>ACA: September 8, 2026<br>Senate (for information): September 18, 2026 | |
| **Year of Next Review** | 2033-2034 | |
| **Progress Report** | June 2029 | |

**Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process**

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the Graduate Philosophy Program delivered by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

This FAR considers the following documents:

- the program's self-study brief;
- the external reviewers' report;
- the response from the Program; and
- the response from the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewers – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Subcommittee on Program Review - Graduate (SUPR-G) and the Senate Committee on Academic Curriculum and Awards (ACA), then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance. Subsequently, it is publicly accessible on Western's IQAP website. The FAR is the only document from the cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Graduate Philosophy Program, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), and SUPR-G.

## Executive Summary

The Philosophy Department has offered a Master of Arts (MA) degree since the late 1940s and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree since the late 1960s. Currently, the department offers two graduate degrees: a one-year MA and a PhD, across five fields of research: Feminist Philosophy; History of Philosophy; Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy; Philosophy of Mind and Language; and the Philosophy of Science. Total enrolment in the MA was at 18, and at 77 for the PhD in 2023-2024.

The Department maintains a close relationship with the Rotman Institute of Philosophy, a research centre focused on philosophical questions arising in the sciences. The Institute was previously housed within the Department but became an independent University-level institute in 2023. The Department is also home to the Centre for Digital Philosophy, which develops and maintains several of the most widely used open-access platforms in the global philosophy community, including PhilPapers, PhilJobs, PhilEvents, and PhilArchive.

The Department is committed to preparing graduate students for a diverse range of career paths, both within and beyond academia. The primary goal is to foster the development of research, writing, teaching, and professional skills that support success in academic philosophy while also equipping students for careers in alternative fields for which a background in philosophy is beneficial, such as careers in law, policy, publishing, and public service.

The self-study was informed by a focus group session with 17 MA and PhD students as well as a departmental retreat, at which faculty discussed the findings of the focus group alongside their own reflections on program strengths and challenges.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Philosophy Graduate Program. They offer 13 recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

## Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- International reputation and research breadth of faculty members: The Department is ranked 50th worldwide by QS and 4th in Canada by the Philosophical Gourmet Report.
- Strong sense of community between students and faculty and the high quality of instruction.
- Strong relationship with the Rotman Institute of Philosophy provides graduate students with access to interdisciplinary research, the Lab Associates Program at the Centre for Brain and Mind, reading groups, and dedicated workspace—fostering unique cross-disciplinary engagement.

- Dual MA program with Renmin University and Fudan University in China. Students from these institutions complete one year of a two-year MA in China and graduate with degrees from both institutions.
- Active chapter of Minorities and Philosophy (MAP), promoting inclusivity within the discipline. MAP organizes an annual conference featuring undergraduate speakers, providing mentorship opportunities and helping to foster early-career scholarly development in a supportive environment.
- The department's Climate Committee addresses a wide range of issues related to the department's intellectual, social, and interpersonal environment, broadly construed, and includes staff and student representatives.
- Graduate students regularly present at major international conferences and publish in highly regarded journals.

**Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program**

- Faculty complement decline threatening program breadth and supervisory capacity. Need to plan for upcoming faculty retirements to maintain coverage in core areas.
- Improve communication and clarity regarding student progression expectations and timelines, with emphasis at the prospectus stage.
- Underutilized and underdeveloped non-academic career support.
- Rotating course schedules are posted too late for effective planning.
- Funding is no longer competitive with peer Ontario philosophy programs, particularly for international MA students.

**Review Process**

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, one internal reviewer and a graduate student reviewer, were provided with Volume I and II of the self-study brief in advance of the scheduled review and then met in-person (with one reviewer joining remotely) over two days with the:

- Vice-Provost, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Associate Vice-Provost, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Administrative Coordinator, School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy & Faculty
- Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Associate Dean Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Director, Rorman Institute
- Members of Western Libraries
- Department Chair
- Graduate Chair
- Program Faculty Members

- Graduate Program Staff
- Graduate Students
- Members of Western's Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) Chapter

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and Dean for review and response. Formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Program and Decanal responses form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR). The FAR is collated and submitted to the SGPS and to SUPR-G by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

**Summative Assessment – External Reviewers' Report**

External reviewers shared that "*the faculty of the department are clearly deeply devoted to both maintaining research excellence and properly supporting graduate students.*"

**Strengths of the Program:**

- Excellent and well-respected faculty members with significant and ambitious research programmes and a strong international profile.
- Recognized strengths in feminist philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science (especially neuroscience and philosophy of physics), history of philosophy, and value theory.
- Innovative Prospectus Course designed to guide students toward on-time completion – and willingness to continue rethinking practices to improve student progression.
- Facilities and research infrastructure. For instance, hosting of PhilPapers viewed as "the premier research tool in philosophy worldwide" is described as a great asset.
- Proactive climate and equity initiatives toward hiring women, establishing a Climate Committee, conducting climate surveys, providing graduate student mentors, forming a Welcoming Committee, and implementing a Safer Classrooms module.

**Prospective Areas of Improvement for the Program to Consider**

- Current funding has not kept pace with the cost of living, forcing students to take outside work which directly delays completion, reduces program participation, and weakens the Department's ability to recruit top applicants (associated with recommendation #1).
- The prospectus course, while innovative in design, is undermined because students frequently enter it without having completed prior requirements, resulting in compounding delays rather than the structured progression.

    - Comprehensive exams are a significant barrier to timely progression. Consider alternative milestone models(associated with recommendation #3).
- Establish more regular, department-wide events for building community cohesion (associated with recommendation #4).
- Providing teaching experience for graduate students, which is very valuable for those seeking academic posts(associated with recommendation #10).
- Clarifying admissions standards for prospective students (associated with recommendation #2), ways for current students to find a supervisor (associated with recommendation #13) and expectations regarding supervision (associated with recommendation #12).
- Considerable variation among supervisors in terms of frequency of meetings, supportive mentoring, and prompt feedback.
- Hybrid delivery and teaching opportunities for graduate students should be explored.

**Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses**

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers.

| Reviewers' Recommendation | Program/Faculty Response |
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| **Recommendation #1: Bolster Graduate Student Funding**<br>Graduate funding has not kept up with the cost of living. This negatively affects student progression since students are required to work on the side to support themselves. It also negatively affects student residency in London: students cannot afford to live in London, and this not only increases their travel time, but does not allow them to participate in the program as much as ideal. Further, lack of graduate student funding, negatively affects the quality of students that the department can attract. | **Program:** Base graduate student funding packages are determined at the Faculty level and not set by individual Departments (though there has been discussion recently of introducing flexibility for individual units to set their own priorities in funding, such as offering more funding to doctoral students at the expense of funding for MA students). The Department has supplemented, and continues to supplement, base graduate student funding by offering qualified students scholarships/fellowships drawn from external and internal research funds. Data that the Department collected in 2024 indicated that faculty members had contributed approximately $775,000 in external research monies to graduate students (in the form of scholarships, graduate research assistantships, and graduate fellowships) since 2016. The Department continues to encourage faculty members to apply for external research funding to support graduate students.<br><br>**Faculty**: The Faculty agrees with the program response but would add that the Faculty cannot be so flexible in the future about funding packages that it violates the minimum funding guarantee for PhD students. The Faculty agrees that graduate funding packages need to increase, although it's been difficult to do that because of budget deficits. |
| **Recommendation #2: Update Admission Standards Documentation** | **Program:** The program will ensure the webpage is clearly stating that requirements are only minimum requirements and that admissions is competitive, resulting in applicants meeting the minimum requirements not being guaranteed admissions.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response. |

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| **Recommendation #3: Replace Comprehensive Exams with Alternatives**<br>For instance:<br>• Waterloo "Research Area" model: Students contract with a supervisor on a topic, readings, and assignments over two terms to deepen expertise or prepare for the PhD.<br>• Western WSGS model: Students choose between a research paper plus a detailed course syllabus, or two research papers.<br>• Prospectus-as-milestone model: The existing dissertation prospectus and two-hour proposal defense would serve as the sole gateway between coursework and dissertation writing, eliminating comprehensives entirely. | **Program:** The Department will create a subcommittee, chaired by the Graduate Chair and composed of faculty members and current PhD students to conduct research on pre-dissertation requirements of other philosophy departments and the needs of our graduate students, and to offer one or more proposals for modifying our requirements to the Graduate Affairs Committee (GAC).<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response and is happy to help implement whatever change is agreed on. |
| **Recommendation #4: Establish Regular Community-Building Events**<br>Perhaps a small budget could be allocated to low-cost treats and a work-in-progress seminar for faculty and grad students. The latter is inexpensive and especially useful for building community cohesion. | **Program:** The Department will draw on accumulated monies in our Highest Priority Needs fund, and other donor sources, to support and enhance graduate student and faculty events. The Department will also consider introducing a work-in-progress seminar. In the past, we held Philosophical Briefings—informal 15-minute presentations on faculty research—which we may consider reinstating. We will consider various models and involve graduate students in this discussion as appropriate.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response. |
| **Recommendation #5: Ensure Best Practice for Climate Reviews**<br>The university should explicitly allow department members to contact reviewers to arrange a private conversation if desired. | **Program:** This is a matter for SGPS and the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement to consider. The Department will support these units' response.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response. |

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| **Recommendation #6: Resume Regular Climate Surveys**<br>Perhaps every year, or every other year, to get a clearer picture of the atmosphere for graduate students. | **Program:** The Climate Committee is already planning a climate survey for this year, and the Department Chair will ensure that future Climate Committee chairs are aware of the importance of conducting such surveys on a regular basis.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response. |
| **Recommendation #7: Enable Anonymous Reporting of Concerns** | **Program:** The Climate Committee has discussed the idea of an online feedback form and has a version that is ready to share with the Department for feedback. The aim of the form will be, positively, to solicit suggestions of ways in which the Department could strengthen its equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts. The program will also continue to support students in directing formal complaints to appropriate channels (e.g., the Office of the Ombudsperson).<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response. |
| **Recommendation #8: Model Respect for Diverse Approaches**<br>Cultivate and model respect for different topics and approaches to philosophy. Careful faculty modelling of respect for a wide range of methodologies and topics can do a great deal to set a tone that students follow. | **Program:** The program will discuss ways of communicating the Department's appreciation of and respect for the diversity of research interests represented by our community, including ways of making community members mindful of the attitudes they convey both privately and publicly (e.g., on social media). This may involve adding language to the department website affirming its appreciation of and respect for the diversity of faculty research interests. A works-in-progress session may indirectly help address this recommendation, since it would help familiarize faculty and graduate students with the diversity of research interests represented in our department. Conducting regular climate surveys will allow us to monitor progress.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response. |

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| **Recommendation #9: Clarify Expectations in Shared Courses**<br>Urge the faculty who are teaching courses shared with undergraduates to be explicit with students about how they are approaching the issue of level, so that graduate students understand the courses are not actually beneath them. | **Program:** This concerns cross-listed graduate/undergraduate courses. The Department will communicate this recommendation to faculty and will recommend communicating clearly in course outlines and elsewhere how course requirements and/or grading expectations differ for undergraduate and graduate courses.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response. |
| **Recommendation #10: Hire PhD Students as Sessionals, if possible.** | **Program:** Sessional teaching opportunities for graduate students are limited because standing limited-duties appointments hold priority for most higher-enrollment courses. Additional concerns include the potential impact on student progression when students assume sole course responsibility, and equity considerations, as such opportunities cannot be offered to all students on track in the program. Mindful of these constraints and concerns, but also of the fact that teaching experience is important for employment outcomes after graduating, the Department developed the "Mentorship in University Teaching" (MiUT), which allows graduate students to work with a regular faculty mentor, in the context of a GTAship, to help design and deliver a portion of a course (usually between 3-4 weeks of lectures). We will continue to encourage instructors to offer MiUTs, emphasizing their importance in graduate education.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response and agrees with the reviewers that PhD students at Western should have opportunities for sessional teaching. There are too many barriers to that now, including financial ones that prevent our Faculty from offering more limited-duties teaching. The program has been creative in developing the "MiUT" option for its PhD students. |

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| **Recommendation #11: Introduce a Publication-Focused Seminar**<br>Consider introducing a 3rd-year paper seminar as an optional course for students aiming to secure an academic job. Students could come into the seminar with their best or favourite paper written so far. The goal of the seminar would be to help students get this paper to a state that it can be submitted to an academic journal. | **Program:** The Department will consider this at a GAC meeting, bearing in mind that teaching resources are already rather stretched. If a seminar is not possible or desirable, the program will consider offering a workshop on academic publishing, offering students advice on, for example, whether and how to publish, where to publish, how to respond to referee comments. The outcome of the discussion on comprehensive exams might also inform the decision on how to best support students in publishing, since one alternative model to that of comprehensive exams is a qualifying paper model, which would produce a potentially publishable paper as an output.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response. |
| **Recommendation #12: Formalize Supervisory Expectation Contracts**<br>Consider reinstating the practice of making a (revisable) contract with the supervisor about expectations, including turnaround time and frequency of meetings. | **Program:** The Department will consider this at a GAC meeting. Members of the department may be able to provide sample contracts.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response and would be happy to provide it with sample contracts. |
| **Recommendation #13: Improve Guidance on Finding Supervisors** | **Program:** The program has recently begun a practice of asking faculty members if they are taking on new students at the time of determining graduate admissions, which we hope will make it easier to ensure supervisory capacity in students' areas of interest and to minimize cases in which students' research projects don't align with faculty expertise.<br><br>**Faculty:** The Faculty supports the program's response. |

## Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Graduate Program Chair, in consultation with the SGPS and the Dean of the Faculty are responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan. Recommendation #5 has not been included in the Implementation Plan as it is outside of the scope of the Program and Faculty. It will be considered by the OAQE and SGPS as outlined above.

| Recommendation | Proposed Action and Follow-up | Responsibility | Timeline |
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| **Recommendation #1:** Bolster Graduate Student Funding | • Continue to supplement base student funding by offering qualified students scholarships/fellowships drawn from external and internal research funds.<br>• Encourage faculty members to apply for external research funding to support graduate students, including for recruitment purposes.<br>• Work with new decanal team to examine alternative ways of increasing the funding packages. | Department Chair; Graduate Chair; Dean's Office | Report back as part of progress report in June 2029 |
| **Recommendation #2:** Update Admission Standards Documentation | • Ensure that the webpage is clear – emphasizing that the stated requirements are minimum requirements, and that admissions are competitive resulting in applicants meeting the minimum requirements not being guaranteed admission. | Graduate Chair; | By Sept 2026 |
| **Recommendation #3:** Replace Comprehensive Exams with Alternatives | • Create a subcommittee, chaired by the Graduate Chair and composed of faculty members and current PhD students, to conduct research on pre-dissertation requirements of other philosophy departments and the needs of the program's graduate students.<br>• Offer one or more proposals for modifying our requirements to the GAC. | Department Chair; Graduate Chair; | By January 2027 |

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| **Recommendation #4:** Establish Regular Community-Building Events | • Draw on accumulated monies in the Highest Priority Needs Fund, and other donor sources, to support and enhance graduate student and faculty events.<br>• Consider introducing a work-in-progress seminar. | Department Chair; Graduate Chair; | By Sept 2026 |
| **Recommendation #6:** Resume Regular Climate Surveys | • Implement a climate survey by the end of the calendar year.<br>• Establish a regular frequency of future surveys. | Department Chair; Climate Cmmt Chair | By Dec 2026 |
| **Recommendation #7:** Enable Anonymous Reporting of Concerns | • Develop an online feedback form and seek feedback from department members.<br>• Continue to support students in directing formal complaints to appropriate channels (e.g., the Office of the Ombudsperson). | Department Chair | By Dec 2026 |
| **Recommendation #8:** Model Respect for Diverse Approaches | • Discuss ways of communicating the Department's appreciation of and respect for the diversity of research interests represented by our community, including ways of making community members mindful of the attitudes they convey both privately and publicly (e.g., on social media).<br>• Examine adding language to the department website affirming the program's appreciation of and respect for the diversity of faculty research interests. | Department Chair; Graduate Chair | By Sept 2026 |
| **Recommendation #9:** Clarify Expectations in Shared Courses | • Strongly encourage faculty members to communicate clearly in course outlines and elsewhere how course requirements and/or grading expectations differ for undergraduate and graduate courses. | Department Chair; | By Sept 2026 |
| **Recommendation #10:** Hire PhD Students as Sessionals | • Encourage instructors to offer MiUTs, emphasizing their importance in graduate education. | Department Chair; | By Sept 2026 |

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| **Recommendation #11:** Introduce a Publication-Focused Seminar | • Examine ways to support academic publishing (e.g. workshop, seminar), offering students advice on, for example, how to publish, where to publish, how to respond to referee comments | Department Chair; GAC | By Sept 2026 |
| **Recommendation #12:** Formalize Supervisory Expectation Contracts | • Examine this option in depth and other ways to support the supervisory relationship as part of the work of the GAC.<br>• Solicit examples – e.g., from members of the department. | Department Chair; GAC | By Sept 2026 |
| **Recommendation #13:** Improve Guidance on Finding Supervisors | • Reinstate and review the first-year faculty mentorship program, which pairs incoming students with a faculty mentor.<br>• Communicate clearly that students' mentors and the Graduate Chair are available to help students find a supervisor. | Department Chair; Graduate Chair | By Sept 2026 |