

Five Year Program Review: Philosophy Program, Weber State University

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Introduction

On 27 January 2012, the review committee met with faculty, staff, and students (both current and recently graduated) of the Philosophy program at Weber State University, as well as the chair of Political Science and Philosophy and the dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Our overall conclusion, documented below, is that the Philosophy program demonstrates consistent excellence in its teaching and service roles at Weber State University.

A. Mission

The program's mission statement is clear and appropriate, though the committee notes that the program should also include in its statement that, along with providing methodological training in logic and analysis, it also provides training in clear and accurate exposition as well as oral communication skills.

B. Curriculum

The program's curriculum and scheduled offerings are designed so as to maximize its delivery of both general education courses and upper-division Philosophy courses. However, given the program's staffing and its large participation in general education, sometimes not enough upper-division courses are offered to meet student demand. We tag this as an area for concern. Faculty have been meeting the additional needs of students through offering independent-study courses, but this is an ad hoc solution, and the demand is certainly sufficient to warrant an additional faculty member (as argued further in E, below).

C. Student learning outcomes and assessment

The program has developed a straightforward and intelligent system for assessing student learning, both for its general education offerings and for the classes taken for the major. Results from assessment measures indicate that the program is very effective in delivering the education it aims to provide.

Moreover, our conversations with students (including recent graduates) indicate that the program has created a vibrant culture of learning, discovery, and friendly inquiry. Students are welcomed to think critically, challenge their instructors, and think through questions with them. All of the students we met expressed, with hearty enthusiasm, the positive difference the Philosophy program has made in their lives. The steady successes of Ethics Bowl and NOUS further demonstrate the program's success in cultivating a learning environment that extends beyond the classroom.

The review committee also commends the faculty in its efforts to recruit female students to the major, as Philosophy programs are often dominated by male enrollments.

D. Academic advising

It is clear that the faculty members make themselves readily available to students to advise them about curriculum planning and graduate school opportunities, and students make use of their availability. The program has not developed a formal means for assessing its advising effectiveness, but, for a program of this size, it is not clear that any formal assessment for advising is needed. Conversations with the students amply testify to the helpfulness and availability of advising from the faculty in the program.

E. Faculty

The faculty members are very qualified in their areas, dedicated to the success of the program, and very collegial. Each demonstrates on-going engagement with the professional discipline. We also commend the faculty for assigning teaching responsibilities in such a way that the lower-division load is borne equally among them and faculty teaching interests are given equal consideration. We also commend the faculty members for arranging a rotating one-course reduction among them, so as to give each member some additional time for their research activities.

However, we tag the small number of faculty as an area of concern. The faculty are providing a great service to the university in their general education offerings, but the cost of this service is fewer and less frequent upper-division offerings for Philosophy majors and minors. It is clear that adding one additional tenure-track member to the faculty would go a long way toward meeting this need. Furthermore, by adding a member, the university would also receive additional general education courses, which are surely in great demand as Weber State's enrollments grow.

F. Program support

The program is well-supported in its operations, including facilities, equipment, and library support. The building in which the program is housed is aged, but renovations are being proposed.

G. Relationships with external communities

The program as a whole reaches out to the wider community through its NOUS meetings, Ethics Bowl participation, and its involvement with the Richard Richards Institute. Moreover, it is a "good citizen" among Philosophy programs throughout the state, as it has hosted the Intermountain Philosophy Conference and actively encourages other institutions to participate in Ethics Bowl. It should also be noted that each faculty member is also active with broader community engagements.