

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

PROGRAM UNDER REVIEW

PROGRAM	SENATE APPROVAL DATE	PREPARED BY
Philosophy	May 10, 2024	Provost and Vice-President

A. SUMMARY OF REVIEW PROCESS & LISTING OF PROGRAMS UNDER REVIEW

SELF-STUDY REVIEW TIMELINE	DATE
1. Self-Study Presented to AQAPC	June 23, 2023
2. Site Visit Conducted	October 16, 18 & 20, 2023
3. Reviewer's Report Received	November 22, 2023
4. Internal Reviewers Response Received	January 2, 2024
5. Dean's Response Received	February 13, 2024

The members of the review committee were:

- Dr. Jane Dryden, Mount Allison University
- Dr. Gary Foster, Wilfred Laurier University

The academic programs offered by the Department which were examined as part of the review included:

- Bachelor of Arts - Philosophy

This review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by Senate on April 26, 2019.

B. PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Overall, we have both been impressed by the quality of the Philosophy program, especially in light of its dwindling resources. The program members have done a lot with a little. Not only have the members maintained a quality undergraduate program, graduating students who have gone on to be successful in graduate programs, professional programs, and in the work environment, but they have provided important courses to other programs at Nipissing.

C. OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

NOTE: COMMENTS BELOW ARE AS RECEIVED

External Reviewers Recommendation #1: In light of the retirements of two of the three full-time Philosophy program members, we recommend at least one full-time, tenure-track hiring (ideally two). This is important for the Philosophy program itself, the diversity of pedagogical styles the students are exposed to, and the ability for Philosophy to contribute substantially to other programs in the University.

Unit's Response: The IRC strongly endorses this recommendation. It is understood that two tenure-track hires may be beyond the resources of the University at present; however, given that two long-serving, tenured faculty have recently retired, one tenure-track hire in Philosophy is both urgently needed and compatible Philosophy continuing to contribute considerable cost savings to the institution.

If changes to the direction of the Philosophy program enable it to grow its enrolments, it is hoped that a third permanent position could be restored to the program. It should be noted, however, that members of the Academic Unit, as well as the IRC, have raised concerns that the reduction of the faculty complement to two members, even for an interim period, is likely to entail the loss of some of what has made the Philosophy program at Nipissing distinctive and progressive within the North American context – in particular, our ability to offer non-Western philosophy. This loss is substantial and a harm to the University. A new hire could address this loss, but only at the cost of other potential contributions.

Dean's Response: I agree with the ERC and IRC that a second tenure-track hire in Philosophy would be required to support a Major, and new program initiatives in collaboration with other faculty members. All new tenure-track position requests are ranked within Arts and Science and considered within the list of position requests from across the university. The Dean's office will continue to advocate for the renewal of faculty positions in existing and new program initiatives which have a clear and strong case for investment.

Provost's Response: The University has established a robust process for making position requests which are reviewed annually as part of the budget cycle. It is vital that position requests are linked to strategic priorities, and there is a case to be made by Philosophy for a position to reinforce expertise in Ethics. Dr. Borman has a distinguished record of teaching and innovation through the Environmental Ethics course; there is a need define Nipissing's distinctive advantage to include ethics in programs like Business, Nursing, Education, Healthcare (broadly), Computer Science, etc. This will necessarily involve the support and negotiation between Faculties and Deans to ensure an integrated offering. This seems most promising as a pathway to ensure academic rigor, innovation, and viability across programs.

External Reviewers Recommendation #2: With the help of at least one full-time hire we believe that Philosophy can maintain its major and, as mentioned above, we think that this is the best way for Philosophy to remain vital to the University and for it to support other programs. We therefore recommend Philosophy maintaining the major.

Unit's Response: The IRC strongly endorses this recommendation. Indeed, as the reviewers' report makes clear, Philosophy has contributed and continues to contribute broadly within the university, has been consistently innovative in its curriculum development, and satisfies important criteria of both the current Strategic Plan as well as the Mission of the University, outlined in the Nipissing University Act. A strong Philosophy major is crucial to any university, and has special significance at Nipissing now that it is the only Philosophy program available in Northeastern Ontario.

In this connection, members of the IRC flagged for concern that, while the current Strategic Plan takes important steps towards acknowledging the place of Nipissing University on Anishinaabeg land and our obligations towards this place, its people and history; at the same time, this Plan does not acknowledge the tradition and history that lies behind the modern university itself, a tradition which is centred in Philosophy.

Dean's Response: I support the recommendation of the ERC and IRC to maintain a Major in Philosophy. I support a tenure-track position request that will also help contribute to a new program initiative in Ethics and Public Policy. All new tenure-track position requests are ranked within Arts and Science and considered within the list of position requests from across the university. The Dean's office will continue to advocate for the renewal of faculty positions in existing and new program initiatives, which have a clear and strong case for investment. The Dean's office looks forward to working with the faculty members and Manager of Quality Assurance and Program Innovation to create an Ethics and Public Policy program and revise the Philosophy program structure.

Provost's Response: Insofar as Recommendation #2 echoes Recommendation #1, I encourage all faculty with expertise in Philosophy to work collectively to support innovative initiatives to ensure that students continue to benefit from a university education that centres Philosophy. I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to say that honours specializations and/or single subject majors in discrete departments are not the only ways to ensure that students engage in the critical thinking, research and learning that is intrinsic to Philosophy. The University is absolutely invested in maintaining a rich philosophical conversation. We are seeking to ensure that the model we create reflects our recruitment patterns/demand, the needs and interests of students, and reflects the evolving nature of the discipline while being financially viable over the long term. This is not simple work and I very much appreciate the willingness of faculty to invest in process of program innovation and renewal.

External Reviewers Recommendation #3: One way that the Philosophy program may be able to maintain its major would be to re-structure the program requirements such that, for the most part, instead of naming specific courses, they specify taking a certain number of courses at various levels or in various areas. This will give some flexibility for the Department to adapt to the teaching specialties and competencies of any new member who is hired. On this recommendation, specific courses would be named in the requirements only in those instances where they are deemed by Philosophy program to be a key priority for all majors.

Unit's Response: The IRC and, more specifically, the members of Philosophy, agree. According, PHIL will be putting forward motions to alter the degree requirements in Philosophy, and pursuant to consultation with the Registrar's office, and others. Additional curriculum reforms under consideration include banking courses, and creating new Philosophy and Ethics courses to support new and existing programs.

Dean's Response: I agree with the ERC and IRC that the Philosophy program design could be more flexible. Philosophy is a discipline that will require core or foundational courses for majors in the program; however, by defining a specific number of upper-level credits, faculty can cycle courses to meet the degree requirements for the Philosophy Major, as well as deliver service courses to other program (e.g. Digital Ethics for Computer Science).

Provost's Response: I look forward to seeing how Recommendation #3 will be mapped out. I have concerns that any quest for "flexibility" be counterbalanced by a recognition of disciplinary rigor. I have noted that there have been movements in the past to eliminate pre-requisites or to make upper year courses open to any student (no matter their experience or preparation). My caution is that, if this is the consequence of Recommendation #3, it will almost invariably ensure that every course is introductory; and this is clearly not desirable. If instead Recommendation #3 returns us to the learning outcomes and curriculum maps for cognate degree programs and thereby allows the University to recognize added strengths/depth/capacity through inter- and trans-program collaboration (built in the degree structure), this would be a benefit.

External Reviewers Recommendation #4: Consider ways in which promising 4th (possibly 3rd) year students might be able to help out in larger first-year courses as teaching assistants. This has been done quite effectively in both of our universities. It has several benefits: (i) it gives the students employment and experience in their field of study via experiential learning, (ii) it tends to instill in them a degree of confidence in their ability to apply what they have learned, and (iii) it can build connections between newer and senior students, particularly when teaching assistants are used for tutorials, study sessions, etc.

Unit's Response: There are budget implications to this proposal that are out of the hands of PHIL. However, the IRC is sensible of the recommendation; and it echoes something that was expressed in the current student and alumni surveys, as well. A tutorial/study session model is the preferred option for the Philosophy program, as opposed to use of undergraduate students as graders. PHIL 1117, in particular, has sufficiently large enrolment most years to justify the use of teaching assistance. A curriculum motion would be required in order to introduce tutorials as part of 1000-level courses; this step would require assurance from the Dean's office that tutorial assistance would, in fact, be reliably available.

Dean's Response: I agree with the ERC and IRC that involving 4th year students in the Philosophy courses as tutorial leaders or drop-in help sessions will provide employment opportunities for students and to build students' confidence and ability to apply their knowledge. It is likely more feasible to introduce the tutorials in the core philosophy courses at the second year, with 4th year students leading tutorial sessions. Other programs in Arts and Science follow a similar model. The Dean's office will work with faculty to identify the unique opportunities they want to (re)introduce to the programs. We will need to start tracking the success of the initiatives relative to the stated goals. Do applications and retention rates increase because of the opportunity to be a tutorial leader in 4th year? Do we see better retention rates from year 2 to year 3 after adding tutorials? A student heading to teachers' college might want the experience of being a tutorial or seminar leader. Philosophy faculty can also participate in graduate programs at Nipissing and involve graduate students in tutorials and seminars.

Provost's Response: I am very happy to focus attention on upper year students and their potential mentorship of first year students. I encourage the Dean to develop the business case for this initiatives, and for other initiatives that reward students in the upper years who are thriving in their courses. We rightly expend a lot of energy on at-risk students, as an institution we need to expend a comparable amount of energy on exceptional students in order that they have the richest educational experience we can provide.

External Reviewers Recommendation #5: As discussed in 2.6 above, we recommend developing book prizes for student awards, possibly with some funding from alumni, which would allow for celebration of student achievement as well as helping strong students develop their CVs.

Unit's Response: This is a good idea – though, inevitably, it will be funded out-of-pocket by faculty, which is not a reasonable outcome in employment relations. Still, if curriculum is reorganized to an “area” based distribution, a prize could be assigned for each area (i.e., “ethics prize”, “history prize”, “metaphysics/epistemology prize”), with students notified in their courses to submit for consideration papers they thought successful. Books could be selected from recent, important publications in each of these areas.

Dean's Response: I agree with the ERC and IRC recommendation that the Philosophy program introduce a book prize. As mentioned above, the Dean's office is asking faculty for ideas about the types of unique opportunities or experiences they want to (re)introduce to their programs. A book prize seems like a small investment for the promotional advertisement we could net in return.

Provost's Response: I agree with this recommendation and the issue it surfaces: how do we encourage students to develop their CVs, see value in their degree choices and their intellectual passions! I encourage the Dean to reflect on this recommendation for degree programs across the Faculty.

D. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Below are the recommendations that require specific action as a result of the Review, along with the identification of the position or unit responsible for the action in question. Notwithstanding the position or unit identified as the being responsible for specific recommendations, the Dean of the Faculty has the overall responsibility for ensuring that the recommended actions are undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSIBLE MEMBER/UNIT	PROJECTED COMPLETION
<p>#1 - <i>we recommend at least one full-time, tenure-track hiring (ideally two).</i></p> <p>The University has established a robust process for making position requests which are reviewed annually as part of the budget cycle. It is vital that position requests are linked to strategic priorities, and there is a case to be made by Philosophy for a position to reinforce expertise in Ethics.</p>	Faculty in conjunction with QAPI, Registrar, Dean	October 1, 2024
<p>#2 - <i>We therefore recommend Philosophy maintaining the major.</i></p> <p>Insofar as Recommendation #2 echoes Recommendation #1, I encourage all faculty with expertise in Philosophy to work collectively to support innovative initiatives to ensure that students continue to benefit from a university education that centres Philosophy.</p>	Faculty in conjunction with QAPI, Registrar, Dean	October 1, 2024
<p>#3- <i>maintain its major would be to re-structure the program requirements such that, for the most part, instead of naming specific courses, they specify taking a certain number of courses at various levels or in various areas.</i></p> <p>I look forward to seeing how Recommendation #3 will be mapped out. I have concerns that any quest for “flexibility” be counterbalanced by a recognition of disciplinary rigor.</p>	Faculty in conjunction with QAPI, Registrar, Dean	October 1, 2024
<p>#4 - <i>Consider ways in which promising 4th (possibly 3rd) year students might be able to help out in larger first-year courses as teaching assistants.</i></p> <p>The Dean to develop the business case for this initiatives, and for other initiatives that reward students in the upper years who are thriving in their courses.</p>	Dean in conjunction with faculty	September 1, 2024
<p>#5 - <i>We recommend developing book prizes for student awards, possibly with some funding from alumni</i></p> <p>Encourage the Dean to reflect on this recommendation for degree programs across the Faculty.</p>	Dean in conjunction with faculty	September 1, 2024

E. CONFIDENTIAL COMMENTS

(This is an optional area that can be used to discuss confidential matters that need to be addressed. This section will be removed when posting the Final Assessment Report on the Quality Assurance Website)