

IBHE PROGRAM REVIEW SUMMARY FORM

1. **Reporting Institution** ___Department of Philosophy – Eastern Illinois University___
2. **Program Review** _____Philosophy B.A._____
3. **Date** _____January 25, 2021_____
4. **Contact Person** _____Dr. Jonelle DePetro, chair_____
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5. Overview

The mission of Philosophy is to provide a rigorous, comprehensive, and up to date curriculum to students majoring in Philosophy as well as to those studying Philosophy as part of their education in the liberal arts and sciences. The particular objectives of the department are twofold: to instill a basic knowledge of the foundations and methods of the discipline among students at all levels, and to provide advanced students with the opportunity to develop research projects according to their own interests. Our courses are purposefully infused with university learning goals and include a heavy emphasis on critical thinking, effective writing, problem solving, and conceptual analysis. In addition, they are taught by faculty who support their teaching with active scholarship and research in their respective areas of specialization. Our mission, therefore, strongly enhances the mission of EIU, supporting free and rigorous inquiry, scholarly research, and a commitment to diversity within a student-centered campus culture.

Philosophy has changed significantly since the last review. Our most significant change is the new degree option in Integrated Studies (PHIS). This option enhances both personal development and professional prospects by allowing students to include courses from other disciplines in a flexible, mentor-advised major. The option is a result of indicators that many of our majors come to us mid-degree and seek double majors. It is especially appealing to double-majors and provides them with a rigorous, competitive, and more marketable final transcript. Additionally, we continue to increase participation in interdisciplinary minors, moving from 6 to 10. This move again allows us to draw upon connections in different disciplines and emphasize their relatedness. We also now participate in Dual Credit initiatives to enhance recruitment, provide expanded opportunities for potential students, and to facilitate partnerships with area high schools. We have also joined in the 3+3 B.A. + JD program, an accelerated law degree program partnership between EIU and Northern Illinois University College of Law. Finally, we have revised our Religious Studies Minor to include an accredited Catholic Studies Program which integrates students from the Catholic Scholars program at the Newman Center serving EIU into our Religious Studies Minor. Other changes include new courses, such as Medical Ethics and Philosophy of Sex and Love, and enhanced online availability, especially in general education.

Some things have not changed. During the review period, the College of Arts and Humanities was restructured, bringing nine additional departments into one unified College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Yet, even in this new, larger unit, Philosophy continues to produce the best student credit hour production per FTE in the College.

6. Major Findings and Recommendations

- a. **Description and assessment of any major changes in the program/disciplinary context**

According to a 2020 article in *US News*, the number of philosophy degrees awarded by US colleges and universities increased between 2016 and 2018. The article cited a *Wall Street Journal* analysis of the long-term earning potential of people with various majors and found that philosophy majors tend to get raises and promotions more quickly than those with other majors. A statistical analysis conducted by FiveThirtyEight analytics in 2015 found that among college graduates, those with philosophy degrees had mid-year earnings higher than those with majors that might be expected to be more lucrative, such as business. In fact, a 2020 article in *American Magazine* notes that a 2017 study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research, found that the net return on investment for a degree in philosophy is equivalent to that of an engineering degree. For one thing, a philosophy degree costs less; another result is that philosophy majors end up earning more over their lifetimes than any other humanities field and more than even some STEM fields. Market demand and centrality to mission is clearly demonstrated by the number of courses we teach that are either required or electives for The School of Business, Neuroscience, Criminology, Pre-Law, Health Studies, and the large number of seats we fill in general education. Increased interest in philosophy is certainly reflected by numbers of philosophy majors at EIU. Philosophy has maintained 19-24 majors for the last 5 years, increased from 11-17 from 2013 to 2017. Our major numbers are steadily growing though we award approximately 5 degrees each year. These numbers combined explain why the department is actually making money for the university. Even upper-level philosophy courses alone turn a small profit. In 2015-2016, for example, only 22% of the Credit Units assigned to Philosophy faculty were allocated to upper-level non-general education Philosophy classes. The student enrollment in those courses was sufficient to cover that portion of Philosophy expenses. If general education courses are included in the calculation, the profit is even higher. It would be a mistake to think that the special abilities of philosophers are not important or familiar to employers. Critical thinking skills, problem-solving, organizational ability and effective writing are important for professional success and are widely recognized hallmarks of a philosophy degree. Educational Testing Services data for 2020-2021 shows that nationally, Philosophy majors score better on the verbal portion of the GRE than all other Social Science/Humanities and Arts majors; they score better on the quantitative section than everyone in Social Science/Humanities and Arts majors except those in Economics and better than everyone in Social Science/Humanities and Arts majors in analytical writing. It is not surprising that Philosophy major Athenamarie Demeros was chosen as the 2017 Commencement Speaker for the College of Arts and Humanities. She was also among those philosophy majors chosen during the review period as Distinguished Seniors. During this review period, EIU Philosophy has successfully placed graduates in Law Schools such as University of Minnesota, ranked 19th in the country, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and University of Chicago. All three philosophy alums attending those schools have successfully passed the bar in their respective states. EIU Philosophy alums have also attended graduate programs in business and classics (EIU and University of Missouri-Columbia), and held careers such as counseling and firefighting. It is noteworthy that philosophy majors are not only successful in being placed in programs, but in a considerable variety of programs. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Data 2019 predict a faster than average growth rate for post-secondary teachers in the fields of philosophy and religious studies - a much better outlook than the decline rate predicted for similar fields of mathematics and science teachers, surgeons, pharmacists, and pediatricians, for example. Of course, as suggested above, our recent graduates are also successful in business or professions, such as Matt O'Brien, currently working on AI for Facebook, who recently led development of a mindfulness product at Lumosity; or Vernon Cisney, recently tenured in Interdisciplinary Studies at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania.

b. Description of major findings and recommendations for program improvement

Administrative evaluations of student learning in the major have been very positive. Student learning objectives support all five of EIU's learning goals with multiple measures; and both direct (faculty surveys on final papers and exams) and indirect (student surveys) are tracked over time. Students continue to exceed the program expectation of "satisfactory" on nearly all objectives according to data derived from faculty responses to surveys that are completed for each final paper and final exam for every student in each course in the major.

Expectations are rigorous. Faculty evaluate higher order skills that directly relate to university learning goals including analysis and evaluation of arguments (critical thinking), expression of ideas (writing and critical reading), and understanding cultural and philosophical pluralism (responsible citizenship). In addition, students demonstrate knowledge of the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophical issues such as those found in current ethical debates.

Part of our success no doubt results from our small course size, our largest class restricted to 40 students. Assessment data indicate that our students score between 85 and 90% of the maximum possible score. Another part of our success is faculty who are heavily immersed in research, with publications during the review period of books, journal articles, book chapters or reviews by every tenured/tenure-track member of the department. In addition, faculty have served as conference presenters at the APA, regional, and international conferences. Recognized for teaching excellence, faculty have received Achievement and Contribution Awards in Teaching and received many Redden Fund Awards for the improvement of undergraduate education. During the review period faculty have been chosen as Faculty Laureate, Mendez Award winner (a service award), Director of the International Philosophy Seminar, Summer National Endowment for the Humanities participant, and books editor for *Philosophy Now Magazine*. And perhaps more importantly, our *students* are participating more than ever in research and scholarship. Students have presented their research at NCUR (National Conference of Undergraduate Research), URSCA (Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activities) and EIU's Student Research and Creative Discovery Conference. In 2019, Philosophy major Rebecca Horan had her article *published* in *dialogue*, the journal of Phi Sigma Tau, the International Honor Society for Philosophy.

All faculty are involved in our assessment process and faculty-supported changes are made based on data. During this review period, the department has introduced a peer tutor with flexible availability. Faculty now identify students who may need help and encourage these students to make use of this resource. In addition, we have put all survey materials online which allows both faculty and students easy access to evaluation materials. This use of technology has been successful in increasing student response rates on surveys and, as noted, all faculty participated in assessing students last year.

In terms of improvement, program changes have been substantial and include curriculum, departmental partnerships, integration activities, collaboration, and assessment. We need a more fine-grained data capture; for example, one that might separate online course data. We also need to offer more scientific and quantitative reasoning opportunities for students since our scores in these areas are not as consistently high as in others. We might begin by simply offering our Philosophy of Science course more often, for example.

We also need a better instrument for alumni surveys. Alumni response to surveys is extremely low and it makes meaningful conclusions difficult. Yet, our contact with alumni has improved immensely, partly because of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter and even just the immediacy of email. We continue to work on ways to keep alumni and faculty engaged with EIU and Philosophy activities.

c. Description of actions taken since the last review

Philosophy has changed significantly since the last review. Our most significant change is the new degree option in Integrated Studies (PHIS). This option enhances both personal development and professional prospects by allowing students to include courses from other disciplines in a flexible, mentor-advised major. It allows students in the sciences, for example such as Pre-Law or Biology, to incorporate their philosophy courses into a holistic study of Medicine, Law, or some other area. The option is a result of indicators that many of our majors come to us mid-degree and seek double majors. It is especially appealing to double-majors and provides them with a rigorous, competitive, and more marketable final transcript. Additionally, we continue to increase participation in interdisciplinary minors, moving from 6 to 10. This move again allows us to draw upon connections in different disciplines and emphasize their relatedness. We also now participate in Dual Credit

initiatives to enhance recruitment, provide expanded opportunities for potential students, and to facilitate partnerships with area high schools. We have also joined in the 3+3 B.A. + JD program, an accelerated law degree program partnership between EIU and Northern Illinois University College of Law. Finally, we have revised our Religious Studies Minor to include an accredited Catholic Studies Program which integrates students from the Catholic Scholars program at the Newman Center serving EIU into our Religious Studies Minor. Other changes include new courses, such as Medical Ethics, a required course in the new Health Studies Minors, and Philosophy of Sex and Love. We have also enhanced our use of technology, especially in general education. This includes not simply offering more courses online, but also, for example, implementing immediate feedback instruments for students in our logic courses. We also responded to CASA reports by including the number of respondents for each objective/question in our assessment instrument and also by explaining how the responsible citizenship data is used to provide information about outcomes. We chose particular questions that met departmental learning goals and clarified expectations.

d. Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review

One of the advantages of being a small program is the flexibility we can allow. This is important because it allows us to encourage students to follow their own self-determined interests. We have revised our program substantially to accommodate those students whose interests merge with philosophy. “College shouldn’t prepare you for your first job, but for the rest of your life,” according to John Kroger, President of Reed College, the liberal arts school attended by Steve Jobs. Jobs credited the school with expanding his horizons to include areas such as calligraphy – certainly an influence in Apple’s design culture. Our changes have integrated the practical benefits a philosophy degree can provide with the benefits of degrees in other disciplines. Philosophy majors earn entrance to medical schools at a higher rate than all other majors, including chemistry and biology; they score higher on admissions tests like the LSAT or the GRE; they gain employment on completing their undergraduate degree at higher than average rates; and they enjoy a reputation for careful analysis, critical thinking, and effective writing.

This review highlights our need to attract majors and to track them carefully after graduation. We need to do both better. We do attract high-quality students; they are successful after graduation. We have been successful in the past attracting donors who continue to contribute annually in very generous amounts. We could do better. A Philosophy Newsletter, for example, might be useful in this area. Recruitment efforts are also needed to increase the visibility and practical benefits of our program. While we do have a Recruitment Committee, the department has been understaffed for quite some time, losing over half of our faculty to retirements during the review period. More tenure-track faculty would help secure us the productivity we need to achieve our academic and recruitment goals and we are working to secure those faculty lines.

COMMENTS FROM CLAS DEANS

Since the last review, the Philosophy program has embarked upon several initiatives to modernize the program and make it more flexible and desirable for today’s undergraduates. Chief among this is the creation of the Integrated Studies Option as described above, which maintains a nice balance between rigor in the philosophy-course base and the allowing of students to fuse that coursework with other academic interests. (Nearly half of majors currently exercise this option.) Average number of majors has grown significantly since last review and the program maintains a high net student credit hour production. The quality of the program is evident by the high-level grad/law school and job placement. Chair and faculty are encouraged to further refine their recruitment and alumni-network strategies so as to continue the growth, and to further include alumni in career development for future undergraduates. We concur that such efforts would be helped along by bringing faculty numbers closer to that of the prior review.

We recommend a decision of **Program in Good Standing**.

7. Outcome

a. Decision:

Program in Good Standing

Program flagged for Priority Review

Program Enrollment Suspended

b. Explanation

The Philosophy faculty have made tremendous strides relative to curriculum development, innovation, and major recruitment—particularly 2nd majors. Indeed, the department’s response to Vitalization and the challenges of the budget impasse demonstrate the program’s commitment to our students and overall creativity of our faculty. I concur with the CLAS Dean’s assessment and advice. The program is in “good standing”.

Jay D. Gatrell
Provost & VPAA