

REVIEW OF THE B.A. IN PHILOSOPHY

Classification of Instruction Programs (CIP) Code: 38.0101
Philosophy

Review Outcome. The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A. in Philosophy to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee recognizes that many of the efforts and activities that led to the development of the self-study report were accomplished during the time period coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee appreciates the thoughtful and critical self-study report that incorporated ample evidence to support the claims that were made. The self-study process involved multiple stakeholders, including faculty, students, and alumni. The program is designed to provide students the opportunity to take a diverse set of courses which include an examination of many of the major themes and periods in the history of philosophy as well as the investigation of contemporary philosophical issues and topics. The curriculum is delivered by faculty members who collaborate to provide foundational and specialized courses. Additionally, the program faculty provides extensive support of the General Education program, interdisciplinary minors, and other venues for philosophical dialogue among students and faculty from disciplines across campus.

The committee commends faculty efforts that have resulted in the program being consistently the second largest undergraduate philosophy program at public institutions in the State of Illinois during the period covering the program review cycle (with an average of 56 students with philosophy as their first or second major). We commend the faculty's activities to focus their recruiting on increasing more first-time-in-college (FTIC) students through increased advertising within their General Education course offerings, the establishment of scholarships (initially geared towards recruitment but now shifted towards retention), and the addition of a full-time academic advisor.

The committee recognizes the program faculty's commitment to activities that support student success. We commend the program on its ability to continue to limit enrollments in many of its courses, which is in keeping with the University's commitment to fostering a small-college atmosphere with large-university opportunities. The committee notes that the program has made efforts to increase the number of students participating in the Honors program on campus through the designation of honors sections for selected courses and the participation of faculty in the Honors Learning Experiences that are offered. The committee also commends the program's support of student engagement opportunities through co-curricular activities (e.g., the Philosophical Society, Department-sponsored colloquia, and the organization and hosting of an annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference). We further commend the program faculty for their support of student participation in research and creative activities, including financial support for conference travel. The committee commends the collaborative work between the Department and the subject librarian to develop a structured, programmatic instruction plan for philosophy students. This includes conversations each semester regarding ways to collaborate with Milner Library faculty and staff to support student work in advanced-level seminar courses.

The committee commends the faculty's work to revise the curriculum during the period of review based on feedback from multiple stakeholders to ensure that it is representative of current trends and needs within the discipline. These efforts included adding structure to encourage breadth of coursework taken by students, the addition of several new courses, and a reduction in number of required advanced-level courses. The committee commends the program faculty for their actions that have infused issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion into the curriculum and other program activities.

The committee notes the faculty members of the program for their scholarly contributions to the B.A. in Philosophy program. Faculty members are active scholars who publish book chapters, articles in peer-reviewed journals, and present at national and international professional conferences.

The committee appreciates the in-depth analysis of aspirational programs. As part of this analysis, the program faculty identified multiple institutions with similar programs that excel in ways to which our program may aspire. The committee also recognizes that faculty developed specific action plans to implement similar initiatives as those to improve the program at Illinois State University.

Recommendations. The Academic Planning Committee thanks faculty and staff of the B.A. in Philosophy program for the opportunity to provide input regarding the program at Illinois State University through consideration of the submitted self-study report. The following committee recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle are provided in a spirit of collaboration with philosophy faculty and staff. In the next program review self-study report, tentatively due October 1, 2028, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

Continue to focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity. The committee recommends that the program faculty develop a comprehensive plan to address issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity. We encourage the program to pursue its goals related to further developing a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment that effectively supports students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds. While the committee commends the program for their recruitment of international faculty and students, the committee urges the program to continue refining and implementing their plans for faculty and student recruitment, including in the plan strategies for increasing enrollment by students from gender, racial, and ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented domestically in the program and discipline. We recommend that the program faculty continue to examine ways to infuse diversity, equity, and inclusion issues into the curriculum.

Continue to explore opportunities to increase enrollments. Given that students may not enter the institution knowing about the program, the committee notes that establishing partnerships with other units on campus can assist in more accurate marketing and promotion of the program. These units could include those that directly interact with prospective and current students who are interested in the discipline and its various subfields, such as the Office of Admissions and University College, respectively, both of which can be helpful in marketing and promoting the program to high school students whose exposure to the discipline may have been limited.

Continue to focus on student success and retention. The committee recommends that the program faculty develop a plan for student success. The plan should be used to increase transparency and communication around student success by defining the program's goals for, assessment of, and actions towards supporting students enrolled in the program. The plan may provide an overarching structure for other plans (e.g., retention, curriculum, alumni engagement). The committee recommends that the program continue monitoring student retention, particularly of students from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Continue to review and revise the curriculum. The committee recognizes substantial work by faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure and content to remain current with changes in the field. The committee encourages the program to continue developing opportunities for student scholarship and creative activities.

Continue to implement and refine the student learning outcomes assessment plan. The committee recognizes faculty for their work to implement the assessment plan during the current review cycle. Given other initiatives identified by the Department, the committee notes that continued examination of student learning can inform these initiatives, such as student retention and success, diversity and inclusion within the curriculum, and tracking and monitoring program alumni. In addition, consistently gathering feedback from stakeholders and developing mechanisms for using this feedback along with other gathered information can provide a more holistic perspective on student learning in the program.

Design and implement a system for tracking alumni. The committee concurs with faculty in its plan to design and implement a system for tracking program alumni and then using the system to enhance alumni networking. Faculty might use information gleaned from its aspirational program analyses to help guide development of the plan. Faculty might also consult faculty from other academic programs regarding strategies used by those programs for alumni networking.

Continue the collaborative work with Milner Library. The committee commends faculty and the subject librarian for their continued work to integrate library instruction sessions with several courses and the tiered approach for learning information fluency skills within those courses. Given recent journal cancellations and expected increases in online and hybrid courses, the committee notes that the Department and Library should work to increase awareness of alternative access to resources, such as Interlibrary Loan and I-Share lending, among philosophy faculty and students.