College of Arts and Sciences  
Dean’s Response to Self Study Report  
Philosophy Department  
December 19, 2008

The Philosophy Department’s Self Study report provides an excellent beginning for the review of the department’s achievements and goals. We thank Dr. George Rainbolt, Dr. Andrew J. Cohen, and the remaining departmental faculty for the time and energy that this endeavor required.

We are pleased with the progress that the Philosophy Department has made since its last self-study. We particularly applaud the many strong hires that Department has made, its reduction in the number of visiting instructors, its active involvement in the Brains and Behavior area of focus, and its effective implementation of critical thinking and writing throughout its curriculum. We know that doing so many searches was a challenge, and are impressed by how successful the department has been in rebuilding the unit in a focused way. We believe that the positive student responses (both alumni and current students) in comparison to other units in the university survey on virtually all items are a reflection of the department’s dedication to providing a strong educational foundation.

The upcoming visit by the external review team provides the department and the Dean’s office with an excellent opportunity to review the progress of the Department and to sharpen our vision for its future. To this end, we will focus here on the key aspects of the program and leave decisions about specific new resources until the action plan is formulated during the later steps in the program review progress. We look forward to the input of the external review team to help us clarify the future directions for strengthening the department. Specifically, our focus below is on areas that further information and analysis would be useful as we plan for the department’s future.

First, what steps should the department take to enhance its undergraduate program? The Philosophy Department’s Introduction to Philosophy course (previously called Great Questions of Philosophy) in the core curriculum provides a strong vehicle for recruiting majors. What changes, if any, would the review team recommend to improve that course’s mission of broadly educating the Georgia State’s student body in the fundamentals of philosophical thinking, and how could the course be strengthened to attract new majors? We would also like the review team to examine the undergraduate major more broadly. What are the appropriate class sizes for courses offered at the 3000/4000 level? Is the content of the curriculum appropriate for preparing students educating in Philosophy? Have the changes in undergraduate advising recently implemented at the departmental level been sufficient to engage students and offer them the information they need to succeed?

Second, what steps should the department take to enhance its graduate program? We would appreciate the external team’s comments on the most appropriate route for strengthening the graduate program and their assessment of the resources that would be
needed to accomplish those plans. More specifically, how can the department capitalize on the strength of its faculty in Brains and Behavior and in Ethics? Is participation in interdisciplinary doctoral programs such as a Ph.D. in Neuroscience a fruitful approach, given the market problems associated with Philosophy graduates more generally? What metrics besides the Leiter Report do other programs use to evaluate the strengths of their graduate program? Does the review team agree with the analysis provided by the department regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their graduate program? Finally, given the results of the graduate students in the survey compared to university advising, what improvements would the team suggest for improving graduate student advisement?

Finally, we would like the external team to reflect on how to strengthen the Philosophy Department in the current times of growing economic challenges. We continue to remain committed to the previous Action Plan hires associated with Brains and Behavior initiative, including the tenure-track hire that is underway during the current year. We would like to be made aware of any avenues that might be available in the field of Philosophy for securing external support or for more efficiently and productively streamlining our current practices. Further, we welcome comments about the Department’s proposed plan for further growth of the faculty.

The Dean’s office again congratulates the Philosophy Department on its impressive strides since the last self-study, and we thank the faculty for their report. The Dean’s office looks forward to the external reviewers’ visit and to working with the Department on an action plan that will make their goals achievable in the next cycle.

Dr. Lauren B. Adamson, Dean

Dr. Carol Winkler, Associate Dean