Philosophy Action Plan Memorandum of Understanding

Status of Action Items from Prior Action Plan

- Split Philosophy and Religious Studies into two academic departments at no cost by maintaining combined supply and staff budgets. **Completed.**
- Hire a full professor in one of the Department's areas of strength. **Completed.** This hire was part of the Brains & Behavior (B&B) Area of Focus. A commitment was made to the new professor (George Graham) that the two junior hires in the 2003 action plan would be in B&B.
- Hire two new junior faculty members in Brains and Behavior. **Partially completed.** One hire was made.
- Build on the success for the Bielefeld and Sorbonne exchange programs. **Partially completed.** The Sorbonne agreement was recently renewed to include undergraduates and faculty. The Bielefeld agreement is currently being renewed on this model. GSU and Bielefeld are planning a joint conference (paid for mostly by Bielefeld). Programs in Britain and in Australia or Korea are not yet developed.

Major Findings in Current Review

External Review Committee

- “The Department...is an excellent program.” It offers “well balanced and strong...undergraduate and graduate curriculum.” “[T]he tenure track faculty are remarkably productive with respect to research.” The Department has “managed its relatively meager resources extremely wisely and efficiently,” has “strong and effective leadership” and “high morale at all levels.”
- The Department should continue its progress towards becoming the nation’s premier MA program. It should not seek to offer a PhD program which, without substantial new resources, would be unranked. (The Department’s MA program is currently tied for second in the influential ranking organized by Brian Leiter.)
- Support for our graduate students is “inadequate” and their GTA workload is “too heavy.”
- The Department should increase the number of TT faculty by completing the last hire envisioned in the 2003 action plan and then hiring 2-4 more TT faculty.
- The Department should separate its 4000- and 6000-level courses but only if the number of TT faculty is increased.

Academic Program Review Committee

- “[C]oncurs with the external reviewers that ‘the tenure track faculty are remarkably productive with respect to research’” and “concurs with the external reviewers that the department has made important, high-quality contributions to the university, through its publications and research and through its teaching load in the undergraduate core courses Phil 1010 and 2010.”
- “Philosophy serves a genuine societal need in helping students confront important questions about knowledge, meaning, and morality. Phil 1010 and 2010 support GSU Strategic Plan goals for developing critical thinking and making ethical choices.”
- Concurs with the external reviewers that the Department should focus on its MA program and not seek to offer a PhD.
- The Department should “[c]omplete the one remaining hire from the 2003 action plan with the proviso that it enable research strengths and ensure the fulfillment of programmatic needs.”
- Concurs with the external reviewers regarding the GTA workload of graduate students.
- The Department should improve its assessment procedures.
Specific Action Steps Over the Next Seven Years to Improve the Department

Research
The Department’s overarching research goal is to be the best philosophy MA program in the United States and thus contribute to the University’s “overarching aspiration...to become one of the nation’s premier research universities” (GSU Strategic Plan).

Over the past 15 years, the Department has developed three areas of strength: legal/political philosophy, neurophilosophy (B&B), and the history of philosophy from Kant to Nietzsche. There is now only one tenured/tenure-track member of the department who does not work in one of these three areas. Assuming that GSU remains in growth mode, we do not anticipate shrinking any area but rather that student demand will lead to growth. We will build on these three areas of strength. The first priority is building in neurophilosophy (B&B). The second priority is to build in legal/political philosophy. Here we will explore collaboration with Political Science and Law as well as new opportunities for collaboration with the Department of Economics. The third priority is growth in the Kant-Nietzsche area.

The Department produces more high-quality research than any of the other top-ten MA programs except the top-ranked (and much wealthier) Tufts. It produces more high-quality research than most unranked philosophy PhD programs. We measure the quality of research by looking at the venue of publications as indicated in the ranking in the Philosophy P&T Manual (developed by a distinguished list of philosophers outside the Department), the number of external grants earned, and the placement of faculty on review boards. We will take the following steps to increase the quantity and quality of our research.

- Complete the last hire envisioned in the 2003 action plan by hiring a TT person in the area of B&B. External reviewers note that for both research and instruction additional faculty is vital. Convert 0.5 of a VI and use some funds from the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Actively participate in the 2CI process. The Neuroethics and Language Development in Cultural Context proposals were both invited to reapply in the 10-11 round of the 2CI. In addition, the Department, in consultation with Political Science, will explore resubmitting the Human Rights proposal.
- Explore creating two interdisciplinary doctoral programs. One will be with the Neuroscience Institute and the other (modeled on Oxford’s Philosophy, Politics and Economics program) will be with units such as Economics, Law, and Political Science.
- Explore the advisability of splitting 4000- and 6000-level with current faculty resources. This is a research action item because the split would increase the ability of high-level research to be integrated into 6000-level courses. External reviewers, student surveys, and faculty experience in the classroom all indicate that combined 4000/6000 courses are not ideal. We will explore whether existing resources permit the split consistent with giving the students a selection of courses adequate for them to pursue their diverse interests. No new resources.
- Increase the number of faculty earning grants. Redeploy departmental travel/professional development money so that faculty who apply for national external grants receive more of this money. Organize workshops by successful grant writers. No new resources required.
- Expand our international efforts with the University of Bielefeld to include undergraduate and faculty exchanges. Build a relationship with a university in Asia (e.g., Korea, Singapore, or Hong Kong). In light of economic conditions, explore the feasibility of expanding our relationship with the University of Cape Town and developing new relationships with institutions in Europe. Our Sorbonne program was recently expanded from a graduate-student-only program to one that includes undergraduates and faculty. We will use this as a model to expand other programs and create new ones. No new resources. Refocus departmental research support and graduate students support resources. Use resources provided by partner institutions.
- Encourage faculty to take advantage of the Department’s policy on flexing teaching load. The Department has a long-standing flex policy and allows faculty to teach more in some semesters and the less in future semesters. Relatively few faculty take advantage of this opportunity and we will explore expanding it. No new resources.
Instruction

The Department’s overarching instructional goal is to better satisfy the need for “critical thinkers” and “responsible citizens” (GSU Strategic Plan).

The Department produces more revenue per dollar budgeted than all but four other departments in the University. Because the dollar value of philosophy research grants is small, the overwhelming majority of this revenue is produced via instruction. Given this role, it is vital that instruction in the Department be of high quality. We will take the following steps to improve the quantity and quality of instruction.

- Continue the redesign of Phil 1010 with the implementation of a new textbook written by Department faculty and the continued use of Supplemental Instruction Leaders (SILs). Explore the possibility of redesign of the course to include web-based labs. Since implementation of SILs and a new textbook, the DFW rate has fallen from 26% to 21.2%. The average grade in classes with an SIL is 2.73 but 2.5 for those without an SIL. No new resources but with additional resources, this program’s proven results could be extended to more sections.

- Reduce graduate students work load by redesigning Phil 1010 to focus on analyzing arguments instead of on producing arguments in papers. This allows for a 25% increase in class size and a reduction in the number of sections that GTAs must cover. No new resources.

- Reduce DFW rates and increase student learning in Phil 2010 (Intro to Philosophy) by developing a new web-based textbook that will be free to students. Textbook cost is an issue for students and all costs hurt RPG rates. Much of the material covered in an intro to philosophy course was written before 1923 and thus not copyrighted. This may develop into a nationally-used resource. No new resources.

- Help fulfill Georgia State's mission to encourage “responsible citizens,” by taking advantage of recent upgrades in the Banner system that allow for much better tracking of minors to increase the number of students who minor in Ethics. No new resources.

- Explore the 4000- and 6000-level course split. See comments under Research above.

- Focus on the social aspects of the philosophy major to increase the number of philosophy majors and their graduation rates. National evidence indicates that social aspects are an important part of retention and graduation efforts. The external reviewers indicate that combined grad-undergrad social events tend to be dominated by grad students. We will provide more social opportunities for our majors by more closely guiding the undergraduate philosophy club. No new resources.

- Increase Honors participation by expanding stand-alone Phil Honors courses and offering add-on Honors section for every course taught by a TT faculty member. National and local data indicate that Honors participation increases RPG rates. No new resources.

- Continue the innovative use of a few higher-value assistantships to increase the quality of the incoming MA students. The Department recently began designating four students to receive higher value stipends ($12k-$15K). Many students apply for these and many of those who do not get the higher awards enroll when offered our standard $6k/year package. In Fall 2006, 55 students applied to the MA program and 34 (61%) were accepted. In Fall 2010, 143 students applied and 32 (22%) were accepted. No new resources.

- Improve and publicize the RPG rates and PhD placement rates in our MA program. For the 2008 cohort of 26, 11 (42%) have graduated, another 11 are enrolled and on track to graduate in three years, and 4 (15%) are no longer in the program. In 2009-2010, 11 students went “on the market,” 9 for the PhD and 2 in law. Three of the 9 philosophy applicants were placed into a top-15 program, and four more were placed into top-50 programs. Both law applicants were accepted into multiple prestigious law schools. (Acceptance rates into top-50 philosophy Ph.D. programs are between 3% and 10%.) No new resources.
George Rainbolt: Date: 10/15/2010
Chair, Department of Philosophy

Lauren B. Adamson: Date: 10/19/10
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Risa Palm: Date: 11/2/10
Provost and Senior Vice President