

**Program Review
Department of Philosophy
Cal Poly Pomona
April 2023**

Reviewer 1: Professor Nellie Wieland
Reviewer 2: Professor Amy Kind

Institution: CSU Long Beach
Institution: Claremont McKenna College

The purpose of this external review of the **Department of Philosophy** is to provide an unbiased examination of the quality of education and service in the program and to identify opportunities for improvement and growth. After carefully reviewing the program's Self Study, we took part in a virtual campus visit on April 13 and an on-campus visit on April 18. We met with David Horner, Interim Dean, CLASS; with Dr. Dale Turner, Chair of the Philosophy Department; with students in the program; with Department faculty and adjunct faculty, and Department staff. This report is divided into sections on strengths, challenges, and recommendations.

Strengths

The CPP Department of Philosophy models the mission and values of the College and University. The self-study offers an exemplary articulation of the ways in which the values of belonging, equity, and justice are meaningfully integrated into their community, curriculum, attention to program structure, events and programming, and outcomes. Concrete evidence of these commitments and outcomes was evident in conversations with faculty who find their work with students particularly meaningful, and with students who – unprompted – offered insightful and impressive evidence of the quality of their education in philosophy.

The Department prioritizes a number of high-impact practices in their curriculum and in extra-curricular opportunities in ways that reflect and even outshine the mission and values of the College and University. Some of these practices include a proseminar for all newly admitted students, a senior seminar, skills labs to support core learning outcomes, a variety of subprograms and research centers that offer events throughout the year, an annual World Philosophy Day that brings together students, families, alumni, and visitors. This is extraordinarily impressive for a program of this size and of these resources. It is our understanding that the integration of these high-impact practices with program curriculum is a priority at CPP and part of the 'polytechnic experience'.

The Department's commitment to a range of high-impact practices and an engaged, forward-thinking curriculum has shaped a program around the empowerment of students who are regularly disempowered. The faculty appear to have taken to heart the disproportionate benefits of hands-on experiential opportunities that accrue to underrepresented and disadvantaged students and made it an organizing principle of their programs. This is commendable and, frankly, something that should be studied by programs throughout the University.

Without fail, each member of the faculty, students, and staff reported that the Department is high functioning, collegial, and even vibrant. This is also something that we inferred from our conversations with College and University administration. Notably, the adjunct faculty members that we spoke with mentioned that they felt supported, included, and respected in the department. The untenured faculty likewise felt supported; they noted that they were included in the recent revision of the RTP document and felt that the expectations for success in the Department were clearly defined, fair, and transparent.

Some additional specific strengths are as follows:

- The faculty appear to be unified in their shared vision of curriculum and program design. The program has a robust emphasis on social/political philosophy, broadly construed, and a commitment to curricular diversity. This shared vision has also led to class coordination across topics and themes, and a commitment to revision of their program learning outcomes and long-term assessment plan. Moreover, even though they have a particular emphasis on social/political philosophy, their curriculum still provides ample coverage of other philosophical areas.
- As was evident from our conversations with both faculty and students, Department faculty are committed to maintaining high instructional standards in their courses. For example, this includes assigning meaningful writing assignments across all levels of instruction even when it is labor-intensive for faculty and may limit enrollment growth. The result is students who are well-positioned to achieve the learning outcomes that are priorities for the program (and, more generally, for the university and for employers).
- The Department has made a series of excellent hires in recent years as they have rebuilt after retirements and departures.
- The self-study reflects an understanding of and commitment to strategizing around potential inequities in outcomes for challenging courses. This includes, but does not appear to be limited to, participation in Learning Resource Center and Supplemental Instruction programs. It is worth noting that the achievement gaps are not sizable by comparison with many other programs and campuses. The program already appears to be doing many things well in cultivating fair and inclusive learning environments.
- The Department participates in interdisciplinary programs, centers, runs the Ethics Bowl, sponsors an undergraduate journal, and even hosts a voluntary summer program where students and faculty come together to read contemporary philosophy and have an opportunity to meet the author. All of these offer students extra-curricular opportunities to develop and apply their philosophy education.
- Several members of the Department have proven quite successful in securing external and internal funding to support centers, programming, and student activities. We recognize that this is difficult and, sometimes, thankless work. We have been impressed by their successes in this area.

Challenges (Threats and Weaknesses)

As indicated above, the Department is a high functioning, vibrant group who are meaningfully contributing to the core values of the College and the University as a whole. The primary threat to the Department comes from the limitations of resources. As we detail below, this presents the Department with a number of challenges. Other challenges arise from the recent upheavals in administration and the shifting priorities that come with each new administrative team.

- Perhaps the most significant challenge that the Department faces is that their faculty are sorely overworked. The change from the quarter system to the semester system was not a net neutral in terms of the impact on faculty time. Although they went from a typical load of 9 classes per year (3-3-3) to a typical load of 8 classes per year (4-4), the fact that they are now teaching 4 classes at a time rather than 3 classes at a time means that they are doing more work on a day-to-day basis. This, combined with dramatically decreased opportunities for release time, has led to the faculty being overworked and it has also had a negative impact on faculty morale. We encourage the administration to find ways to rectify this situation. We note tentative suggestions in our recommendations, below.
- As noted above under “Strengths,” the faculty are committed to very high instructional standards. Our concern is whether these high standards can be maintained on a true 4/4 workload, especially with high class enrollment caps. We see this as a substantial challenge going forward. A loss of these high instructional standards would be a loss to the University as a whole and the value added by philosophy instruction should be protected.
- CPP has undergone a great deal of administrative turnover in recent years. Although this is out of anyone’s control, it does make planning around administrative priorities and opportunities difficult. We hope that administrative and staff positions stabilize in the near future and a clearer consensus around program planning and priorities takes shape.
- A related challenge concerns turnover of ASCs. Having a dedicated ASC is essential for the success of the Department. Given the low salary, it is exceedingly difficult to retain good people, as evidenced by the fact that the current excellent ASC has just announced that she is leaving to take another job after less than two years in her current position. The fact that it takes a lot of time and effort to train a new hire in this position also presents a challenge when there is frequent turnover.
- The Philosophy Department has a unique and successful program to advertise to students but limited means of sharing. Small programs often require all faculty to be hands-on in student outreach and recruitment, alumni outreach, university governance, community outreach, and interdisciplinary collaboration. But all of this important work is layered on top of other teaching, research, and service commitments and is often the first to be set aside. There are some concrete ways in which this can be remedied – both by Department and University support. Some of these recommendations are below.
- An ongoing challenge for primarily GE-serving departments is the changing GE landscape in California. This has occurred over the past five+ years and will continue to change over the next few years in response to AB 928. Most of these changes have come from legislative directives which have been enormously damaging to core liberal arts programs, and some of them have come from the particular response on campuses.

This issue was noted by faculty in conversation as an ongoing concern, and we anticipate that it will continue to be a concern during the next seven years. Although objecting to the statewide legislative has largely proven futile, the Department, with the support of the College, will need to take steps to continue reimagining their GE offerings to integrate with changing GE categories and with satisfying the enrollment and curriculum needs of other programs on campus.

- National trends and statewide legislative directives create new enrollment patterns which in turn impact budgets. Due to budget challenges, there is growing concern that the teacher-scholar model will not be adequately supported going forward and there is concern that there will not be support for (sometimes low enrolled) high-impact courses. Insufficient support for research release time and high-impact courses weighs heavily on the morale of faculty. Our hope is that this is short term and the University finds a way to budget to support both research release and these valuable polytechnic classes.
- One last challenge concerns the lack of office and classroom space available to the Department. Currently, there is only a single office for the 13 adjunct lecturers. This presents significant challenges to efforts to meet one-on-one with students. The lack of classroom space on campus also makes it difficult to adopt new curricular practices. It might be that the Administration should undertake a space planning exercise to see if any space on campus can be freed up to meet some of these very significant needs.

Recommendations (Opportunities)

For the administration

- Insofar as the budget does not allow for more release time, other solutions need to be found. For example, faculty currently face high service loads, and there is a sense that not all of the committee work that they are asked to do is productive or necessary. For some committees, like Curriculum, it is clear that every department needs to have a presence. But for other committees, like the Student Success Committee, it may be that small departments should not be expected to send a faculty member to serve.
- To support the Department's excellent work with high-impact practices, the administration needs to be sure to keep classes at a size that optimize student learning and that are manageable for faculty.
- The administration may want to consider creative ways to recognize and compensate faculty for high-impact work in experiential learning, mentoring, and supervision. Departments and programs throughout the CSU face this challenge, but this is particularly noticeable for faculty coming out of the dual challenges of the conversion from quarter to semester and the pandemic. If the administration can find a way to bank WTU credit or pool excess FTES or to establish S(upervisory)-units in CLASS, or some similar solution, this would go towards supporting these important programs and practices in Philosophy.
- The Administration should affirm a commitment to having a dedicated ASC for the Department of Philosophy. This will further support the Department's abilities to improve

outreach with students, alumni, and community members, and to grow their programs and opportunities for students (e.g., events, programming, internships, practica, etc.).

- The College should facilitate ways to connect the Department with the Admissions Office, so that the Department can communicate with admitted students who are interested in philosophy. Outreach to admitted students can help to improve yield and thereby bring more students into the philosophy major and affiliated programs.
- The administration may want to consider ways to streamline the application process for teacher-scholar and sabbatical applications, as well as other means of obtaining release time, especially as this release time becomes more competitive.
- We encourage the College to consider implementing a formal mentoring process for junior faculty. Though some mentoring needs are discipline-specific, many are not, so there might be ways to have a cross-disciplinary mentoring program across the humanities (and likewise, across the social sciences). This may have the added benefit of helping junior faculty understand the review process at higher levels of review (e.g., College, Dean, Provost), and prepare them for this service in the future.


For the Department

- We encourage the Department to continue brainstorming ways that they can achieve a balance between the need to keep faculty workloads manageable and the need to deliver a quality education to students. We encourage the prioritization of high impact practices, but given how draining they are on faculty time, we think that some compromises may need to be made.
- In line with our recommendation above to the administration, we encourage the department to consider implementing a formal mentoring program for junior faculty.
- We encourage the faculty to look for new ways to partner with other units on campus. Several opportunities were noted regarding partnering and/or cross-listing with Women's and Ethnic Studies. These types of partnerships take years to develop (and are sometimes fruitless) but we still recommend continuing to pursue these relationships over the next period of review.
- We encourage the Department to continue outreach with other units on campus such as admissions, advising, and the career center to enable better recruitment of students. In order to communicate with students, those other units need to be educated as to the unique value of a degree in philosophy and of the vibrant strength of the Department at CPP.
- The department should develop a set schedule for reviewing student learning outcomes so that they can begin an assessment plan; while this plan is in development, they should continue their current efforts at qualitative assessment as best as possible. In developing their assessment plan, the short-term focus should probably be on assessing high-impact and skills-based courses. The longer term focus should be to set a near future deadline for completing the work of revising program learning outcomes and then developing a comprehensive assessment plan for those new PLOs.
- To combat the dwindling resources on campus, the Department should continue its existing robust practice of applying for external grants. Initiatives like World Philosophy

Day, the undergraduate philosophical journal, the CCEP, and Ethics Bowl might all be attractive to external funding bodies.

In conclusion, our general impression of the Philosophy Department is strongly positive. They are a high-functioning department with a clear vision of who they are and what they want to offer to students and how to achieve it. We have been impressed with the faculty commitment to one another, to their research and community engagement, and to their students.

Sincerely,
Amy Kind & Nellie Wieland
April 20, 2023


Amy Kind (Apr 25, 2023 10:20 PDT)

Amy Kind


Nellie Wieland (Apr 25, 2023 10:24 PDT)

Nellie Wieland