



Philosophy

Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan

Faculty / Affiliated University College	King's University College
Degrees Offered	B.A.
Modules Reviewed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philosophy Honours Specialization, Specialization, Major Social Political Thought Honours Specialization, Major
External Consultants	<p>Dr. Sean McGrath, Professor, Memorial University</p> <p>Dr. Jason M. Wirth, Professor, Seattle University</p>
Internal Reviewer	Dr. Laretta Frederking, Vice Principal and Academic Dean, Brescia University College
Date of Site Visit	March 26-27, 2020
Evaluation	Good Quality
Approval Dates	<p>SUPR-U: February 24, 2021</p> <p>SCAPA: March 3, 2021</p> <p>Senate (for information only): March 12, 2021</p>
Year of Next Review	Year of next cyclical review – 2027-28

Overview of Western’s Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process

In accordance with Western’s Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the undergraduate modules delivered by the **Department of Philosophy, King’s University College.**

This report considers and reports on the following documents: the program’s self-study, the external consultants’ report and the responses from the Department and the Associate Dean of Science.

This Final Assessment Report (FAR):

- i) provides an Executive Summary of the Review Process, including an overview of the Department as outlined in the Self-Study brief;
- ii) identifies the strengths of the program;
- iii) identifies opportunities for program enhancement and improvement; and,
- iv) prioritizes the recommendations of the external consultants in the Implementation Plan.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the Final Assessment Report that are required for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, outlines any action or follow-up that is required, and provides the timeline for completion.

The Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan is sent for approval through SUPR-U, SCAPA, Senate and the Ontario Universities’ Council on Quality Assurance and is made available on a publicly accessible location on Western’s IQAP website. The Final Assessment Report with the Implementation Plan is the only document resulting from the undergraduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Program/School/Faculty and SUPR-U.

Executive Summary (as identified in the Self-Study Brief)¹

Overview

King's University College, a Catholic co-educational institution, is one of three University Colleges academically affiliated with The University of Western Ontario. In 2016 the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies was divided into two separate Departments, creating the Department of Philosophy. The Department has four tenured faculty, two tenured faculty, cross listed with the Department of Religious Studies, and Limited Duties faculty. Their mission aligns well with King's Strategic Plan and can be described as follows:

While we provide students with a thorough background in the history and systematic questions of philosophy (culture, ethics, religion, politics, the nature of the self, etc.), the emphasis is on helping them develop as independent thinkers in their own right, thinking about what it means to be human in the context of very real challenges the world is facing today.

Through recent comprehensive program evaluation and development, the Department has revised itself through the development of Learning Outcomes and has mapped the curriculum of the courses to ensure consistency and congruency. They carried out this process by beginning with their fundamental belief that the study of Philosophy should focus

on facilitating a transformative experience in which students are able to develop their own philosophical voices. Only in this way, we believe, will they be prepared to enter the "complex and troubled world"... In both Philosophy and Social Political Thought, "students explore the world, understand their place in it, and work creatively to change it for the better.

The curriculum revisioning process was valuable in that it

proved helpful in developing a clearer perspective of what we valued and what we wanted students to acquire in and through the study of philosophy that would be of value in today's world.

Due to changes in course requirements for undergraduate students and an emphasis on direct employment-related STEM and BMOS programs for undergraduate students, enrolment has declined significantly from 136 students in 2012 to 82 students in 2018. The program is working to alleviate declining enrolment issues and has developed an interdisciplinary module in Social Political Thought that is unique in Canada and interesting to students in a number of areas.

¹ Direct quotes from the review materials are noted in italics; otherwise, all comments are summarized.

Strengths/Innovations of the Program (as identified in the brief)

- Development of new course initiatives, including such topics as
Cyber-Ethics in The Cyber World
Environmental Ethics and Justice
Global Socio-Political Ethics
Ethics in Science and Technology
Data Science Ethics:
- High student satisfaction
- Excellent library support

Challenges for the Department: (as identified in the brief)

- Decline in student enrolment
- Describing and promoting career pathways for the Philosophy undergraduate degree
- Experiential learning opportunities
- Creating a “business model” for Philosophy

Future Initiatives (as identified in the brief)

- Development of a Minor in World Philosophy
- Creating experiential learning opportunities for students
- Developing exchange programs
- Creating a philosophy presence on social media
- Increased use of technology in teaching

Self-Study Process

The self-study of the department was a collective effort involving participation from all members of the Department of Philosophy at King’s University College over the past three years. Multiple faculty meetings were designated for the purposes of reviewing the undergraduate program and resulted in the recent mapping of the curriculum to the Learning Outcomes as described in the brief.

Data were also gathered from students, alumni, administrative staff, and senior leadership via questionnaires to ascertain their views of strength, challenges, and opportunities for future development.

The Self-Study brief notes that irrespective of the cyclical review process,

[t]he main thrust has been in gaining perspective. This has involved critically reflecting on our identity as a Department of philosophy, our strengths and weaknesses, the nature of the new and shifting educational culture of the Academy and the role philosophy might play in it.

Review Process

During the external review, the review committee (comprised of the two external reviewers and one internal reviewer) were provided with Volumes I and II in advance of their visit and then met over two days with:

- John Doerksen, Vice Provost (Academic Programs)
- Karen Campbell, Vice Provost (Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty Relations)
- David Malloy, Principal, King's University College
- Sauro Camiletti, Vice-Principal and Academic Dean,
- Stephen Lofts, Chair, Department of Philosophy
- Dr. Laura Melnyk, Associate Academic Dean, King's University College
- Faculty, Department of Philosophy
- Students, Department of Philosophy
- Tom Jory, Director of Information Technology Services, King's University College
- David Thuss, Manager, Infrastructure and Digital Pedagogies, King's University College
- Dr. Jim Zuccherro, Academic Counsellor, Academic Dean's Office
- Miriam Love, Academic Counsellor, Academic Dean's Office
- Tracey Cunningham, Associate Registrar, Enrolment Services
- Laura Clarke, Academic Program Advisor
- Denise Cooke, Administrative Assistant to Academic Departments/Chairs
- Tim Bugler, Web Developer / Designer, King's University College
- Paula Rayo, Communications, King's University College
- Adrienne Co-Dyre, Director of Libraries, King's University College
- Linda Whidden, Associate Librarian & Head: Technical and Information Resources,

The reviewers also engaged in a tour of the campus building, observing the facilities that support teaching, learning, and research.

Following the onsite review, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Chair and the Dean for review and response. These formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Faculty response, have formed the basis of this summative assessment report of the Philosophy undergraduate program.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers’ Report

The members of the Philosophy Department at King’s understand that, regardless of one’s career path, the unexamined life is not worth living, and that a careful consideration of life’s most important and pressing questions can be ethically transformative and help create women and men for others.

Strengths of the Program

- Development of the new track in Social and Political Thought
- Enthusiastic and appreciative student feedback about the Philosophy program
- Library resources
- Strong affiliation with Western campus
- The program [e]ncourages innovative academic program development, especially by supporting interdisciplinary, experiential and holistic learning, identifying existing opportunities for academic engagement and creating new ones

Challenges for the Program

- Recruitment and increased enrolment of students
- Changed relationship with Saint Peter’s Seminary
- Interdisciplinarity

Summary Statement

We have found the Department of Philosophy at King’s University College at Western University to be acting in good faith and having aligned themselves concretely yet creatively with Western’s mission, values, strategic priorities, and academic plans.

Philosophy is positioning itself not as a career choice, but as integral to any career that one would choose and, as such, it works to endow any course of study at King’s with a philosophical sensibility that resonates with the heart of the mission.

Reviewers’ Key Recommendations and Department/Faculty Responses

REVIEWERS’ RECOMMENDATIONS	DEPARTMENT RESPONSE
<p><u>1. Changing relationship with Saint Peter’s Seminary</u> <i>...We...recommend that Kings’ continue to offer courses that could be of interest to seminarians, and plan activities and outside lectures that will also be of interest to students of Theology.</i></p>	<p>“We hope to have further discussions among members of both Saint Peter’s and the Department to think of ways we can continue to collaborate and re-envision our working relationship, given the changes and challenges mentioned above. Given that our own religious Studies Department continues to have a strong contingent of faculty working in Catholic Theology, we hope to be able to work with them and other members of Religious Studies to build courses and programs that may be of mutual interest and benefit.”</p>
<p><u>2. Outreach to degrees in the helping professions</u> <i>We learned of how many students come to King’s to study the helping professions. While such students may not be interested in certain traditional areas of Philosophy, there are other areas that could be targeted towards them. It struck us that two such possibilities are Disability Studies and Thanatology.</i></p>	<p>“Given the rich tradition of and commitment to issues of social justice, the Department is uniquely placed to offer courses and help in the building of collaborative programs that will appeal to students interested in the helping professions. Most recently, we have incorporated courses from Social justice and Peace Studies as well as Political Science into our Social and Political Thought module. It would be mutually beneficial if we could also include departments like sociology/ criminology as well as the School of Social Work. ... Given the need for students to be sensitive to the needs of diverse populations, the Department is uniquely placed to help give students an appreciation of other meaningful, valuable modes of thought and cultural expression.”</p>
<p><u>3. The module system</u> <i>Many faculty and some administrators worry about the efficacy of the module structure. Although this issue exceeds the scope of our review, it may be worth inaugurating an ongoing discussion regarding its benefits and detriments. It seems that the module system has had a detrimental effect on students choosing electives such as Philosophy.</i></p>	<p>“The module system at Western has been in many ways very limiting for King’s. Many faculty have overlapping interests and given the focus on the Liberal Arts, the module system constrains students and departments in offering very defined and highly specialized programs. As the nature of knowledge changes and as disciplines face the need to draw from other disciplinary expertise, more freedom in how modules are constructed, especially to allow for the recognition of relevant courses outside an existing module, would go a long way in helping departments share resources and build new and innovative programs that would have greater appeal in a more diversified society and</p>

	<p>workplace. The practice of gatekeeping and counting course enrolments and distributing resources, organized and controlled by the modular system, makes it difficult for small departments like Philosophy to build creative programs. The Department would like to urge members of EPC and the Academic Dean to think of ways we can create the conditions for genuine cross fertilization across the disciplines while still safeguarding core traditional fields of study. A flexible modular system would help the College develop programs that can meet the evolving needs of society.”</p>
<p><u>4. Philosophy as support for interdisciplinary programs.</u> <i>...It is worth noting that more than one of the staff members we interviewed warned against Philosophy losing its essential identity and becoming a mere provider of service courses to other programs. In this regard we view the new focus on comparative or world Philosophy a positive step, moving Philosophy beyond the somewhat stale Continental-Analytic divide into a more 21st century perspective. It is something that King’s Philosophy can offer which no one else at UWO can; it is a distinctive and essentially philosophical project, and it will encourage the research of several of the members of the Department.</i></p>	<p>“We are interested in exploring and expanding possibilities for future course and program offerings. Philosophy has responded to requests by History’s new human rights module, King’s One, MEM’s new program in decision-making, and Disability Studies to offer new courses. We appreciate our relationship with Thanatology, and will continue to work with this department, to continue to explore and build possibilities for further course offerings that will be beneficial to both philosophy and thanatology students. As a small program, we find ourselves stretched as we do not have the faculty complement to maintain our interdisciplinary outreach and preserve the integrity of our program, which the reviewers have recognized and generously praised. Some of our faculty have expressed interests in developing courses relevant for Indigenous Studies and environmental ethics, in particular, offerings that explore how to develop methodologies and practices that rethink the legacy of colonialism and building solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and communities; integral ecology; and courses that address timely and sensitive issues, especially from ethical perspectives, which would be relevant for the larger King’s community. To this end, we hope to continue to refine and build our courses such that they will appeal to broader and diverse segments of the student population in order to help students think and respond to pressing questions and issues of the day. We look forward to working with other departments and the ADO to find ways for further interdisciplinary work.”</p>

<p><u>5. Transitioning to online-learning platforms</u> <i>... We encourage King’s Philosophy to rise to the occasion of offering more online classes, while simultaneously protecting what is best about a small, liberal arts curriculum. This could go some distance to increasing enrollments.</i></p>	<p>“COVID-19 helped launch for the very first time a series of successful summer online courses. Enrolments in these courses were strong, and faculty teaching them reported having positive experiences. Given the success of online offerings, a new undertaking for the Department, we feel that having a few more online courses during the year and the summer session may enhance the Department’s outreach to non-Humanities students, especially if the topics chosen speak to important and timely questions of the day. As members of the Department become more familiar with various platforms and online pedagogical tools, we hope to be able to continue the development of online courses well into the future.”</p>
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Summary of the Decanal Response to the External Reviewers’ Report:

In sum, the Philosophy program recognizes the need for reinvigorating its identity and meaning to students and has undertaken that work with its new focus on Social and Political Thought and hiring in the area of ethics. The Academic Dean’s Office is committed to supporting the department as central to the King’s Catholic mission in a “complex and troubled world”.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. The Department Chair/Director, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty/Affiliated University College Principal will be responsible for monitoring the Implementation Plan. The details of progress made will be presented in the Deans’ Annual Report and filed in the Office of the Vice-Provost (Academic).

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
1. Develop courses that respond to and correspond with other programs.	Faculty workshops across programs and campuses	Chair of the Program; Academic Dean	September 2022
2. Maintain some online course offerings.	Evaluate the strength of particular online courses and their appeal	Chair of the Program; Academic Dean	September 2022
3. Enhance diversity of perspectives with course offerings.	Faculty workshops and intentional multiyear scheduling to maximize available courses	Chair of the Program; Academic Dean	ongoing