

Philosophy Department: Academic Unit Planning – Lay Summary

-January 13, 2023

-Arthur Sullivan, Philosophy Department Head

Timeline:

This latest iteration of the Academic Unit Planning process for Memorial University's Philosophy Department commenced in September, 2021. The Self-Study was completed in February, 2022, and the Panel Visit was conducted (remotely via Webex) in April, 2022. The ensuing Action Plan was submitted to the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences on September 7, 2022, and subsequently discussed at a meeting of the Dean and Department Head.

Correspondence was received from the Senate Committee on AUP Planning in December, 2022, in which "the committee notes the completeness of this phase of the process and offers its appreciation for [the] comprehensive, well-organized report".

1. Self-Study Process

We completed this process in three stages:

[Phase 1: Creating a working draft, deadline of beginning of November] Working from the template in the online 'AUP Procedures' document, I delegated primary responsibility for the constituent subsections, and the core ASMs of the department together produced an initial working draft.

[Phase 2: Consultation with stakeholders, deadline of end January] Also guided by the online 'AUP Procedures' document, at this stage our Self-Study working group expanded from the core ASMs to also include three undergraduate students and three graduate students. We also included members from each of the following stakeholder groups: (i) per-course instructors (PCIs); (ii) retirees; (iii) cross-appointed, cognate faculty members. Members of this expanded working group read the **Phase 1: Working draft** and offered feedback. They also helped to craft the next consultative steps, ensuring adequate broad open discussion of relevant issues. This targets the specified desiderata of incorporating student engagement in a meaningful manner, and encouraging input from all stakeholders.

One keystone of Phase 2 was a free-flowing, open consultative meeting that occurred on Tues 16 Nov, and was attended by undergraduate and graduate students, staff, PCIs, retirees, and ASMs. We went item by item through the Phase 1 draft and discussed improvements, omissions, and a variety of related questions. Additionally, we received substantial feedback over email, from stakeholders unable to attend this meeting. Finally, with CIAP's help, we solicited feedback from current and recent students, of all of our programs, via an electronic Student Survey.

Taking all of that into consideration, the Phase 2: Penultimate draft was put together in January, and circulated again to this broad working group for another round of feedback.

[Phase 3, Submit the Self-Study, in February]

2. Panel Review

We enthusiastically welcomed this Panel Report, which gives a rather positive overall assessment of the job that the Philosophy Department has been doing, through very difficult circumstances. In fact, the Panel was clearly *shocked* at what has been allowed to happen to our department – which has long been a good department with a solid national reputation, whose importance within the Atlantic region is rivalled only by Dalhousie. While we are teaching more students, delivering more programs, and producing more research than ever before, our

departmental compliment and resources have been steadily diminishing. The Panel reports that we are drastically, critically “under-resourced”, peopled by “*about half the number of positions of most other Departments of Philosophy in Canada with the same number of students, supervisees, and departmental activities.*” We have not even had a permanent Administrative Secretary for over five years, while our workload continues to grow and our cohort continues to shrink. The degree to which we have become reliant on PCIs to deliver our programs is in many ways sub-optimal.

Accordingly, the bulk of the Panel’s recommendations concern what the university should do to better-resource us, not what we should be doing differently to better-employ our available resources. We concur wholeheartedly.

3. Unit Response and Action Plan

We have tentatively been given 1.5 hires, which will go a long way to rectifying the dire situation which our department has been enduring. We note, though, that at this stage those hires are still tentative – contingent on the details of a targeted hires initiative whose contours is still being negotiated by the Office of the Dean of HSS.

We are also undertaking some of the perennial Curriculum Review work which the Panel’s report has abetted. Under this umbrella, for example, we have two new courses in development – Feminist Philosophy (by Shannon Hoff), and AI Ethics (by Arthur Sullivan).

More broadly, here are the pillars to which we aspire, and toward which we are working:

Three-Year Update:

- 1: having a current and engaging curriculum
2. attaining better success rates with respect to grad students’ external funding applications
3. having renewed our department with three much-needed new hires; being in a more suitable physical environment
4. enacting a vision for the middle-term future of a healthy and vibrant department, in line with wider university Strategic Planning documents