

External Review Report of the Department of Philosophy

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External Review Committee

Jack Zupko, University of Alberta (Committee Chair)

Carolyn McLeod, Western University

Ulrich Mueller, University of Victoria

Executive Summary

There is no doubt that the Philosophy Department at the University of Victoria is one of the very best among comprehensive universities in Canada. Its reputation precedes it in terms of the research productivity of its faculty members, the range and relevance of its courses, and the quality of students it has produced over the past three decades, many of whom have gone on to graduate study in Philosophy. Indeed, the two external members of this review team agreed to serve on it because they think highly of the Department, a sentiment that is widely shared in the Canadian philosophical community.

Throughout our virtual visit, we were struck by the amount of collegial spirit and goodwill evident in the way faculty members, staff, and students spoke about themselves and their programs. Academic departments and programs are ultimately about people, of course. To our mind, UVic Philosophy is a rare combination of faculty, staff, and students collectively dedicated to what they do and willing to go the extra mile to do it. It's important to note that this is not the result of happenstance, but something the Department has worked hard to achieve over many years and has continued to foster. With all the external pressures on humanities programs at Canadian universities these days, philosophy departments with unhappy, unfulfilled, and even jaded faculty members are not uncommon. UVic is not among them. Our aim in this review is to ensure that it doesn't become one of them.

Considering its size, the Department teaches a very large number of students, particularly at the undergraduate level, and maintains a healthy enrollment of Philosophy majors. The faculty complement is strong, with a broad spectrum of research expertise. We saw plenty of evidence, both verbal and quantitative, that undergraduate students love the BA program, the quality of courses on offer, and the regular access they have to faculty members. On the graduate side, the MA program is in reasonably good shape, with solid time-to-degree numbers and a steady output of graduates, many of whom go on to Ph.D. programs elsewhere.

That said, we believe the Department is at a crucial juncture due to pending faculty retirements, persistent challenges in graduate funding, needless precarity for long-term contract instructors, and understaffing in key support positions. What will be lost if these issues are not successfully addressed is the goodwill and student-centered ethos that make

the UVic Philosophy Department such a welcome place for both faculty and students. Such intangibles, once lost, are difficult if not impossible to restore.

There is no institution of higher education in Canada that has not experienced financial challenges in the past few years. The immediate future promises more of the same for everyone. But demographics will be on the side of universities in another 5 years, especially in Western Canada, as the students for whom we're now building more primary and secondary schools move into post-secondary. Accordingly, it makes sense for the University of Victoria to support departments and programs that are functioning well now, to ensure they continue to thrive and carry the UVic brand well into the future. We sometimes miss what is right in front of us. In our judgement, the UVic Philosophy Department represents a wise and strategic investment opportunity for the University.

With this in mind, we offer the following ten recommendations, grouped thematically, along with concrete suggestions in the report below about how to achieve them. We are confident in the Department's ability to discuss, tailor, and implement these suggestions across their programs.

Recommendations

- 1) Review undergraduate program
- 2) Broaden undergraduate course offerings and requirements
- 3) Establish a capstone seminar or project for honours students
- 4) Increase large-sized classes with automated grading
- 5) Collaborate with other units on campus
- 6) Increase applications for external research grants among Philosophy faculty
- 7) Broaden graduate course offerings and improve delivery
- 8) Maintain the faculty complement
- 9) Hold annual departmental retreats
- 10) Hire a full-time staff person as soon as possible