

Philosophy 2014-15 Program Review SWOT

Program's Strengths

Subject matter: The subject matter of philosophy is intrinsically interesting, and inevitably generates student interest. This is a great strength of our program. So long as we provide the discipline with skilled and enthusiastic instructors, sufficient offerings, and adequate space and equipment, the students will come. Our recent course additions, and revitalized lecturer pool, served the program, and its students, well. The budget cuts threaten this, however (see "threats" below).

Instructors: The program is also strong in that it has two enthusiastic and resourceful full-time instructors. All of our courses are current, and we are expanding our ability to offer hybrid and online variants of our courses. When our previous President (Martinez) asked for new degrees, we immediately wrote our AA in PHIL. Now that the State is demanding AA-T degrees, we are writing one of those. Both FT instructors have received consistently excellent evaluations from both students and their immediate supervisor.

Program's Weaknesses

Reputation: Philosophy has a reputation for difficulty that inspires some students to avoid PHIL courses, especially when courses in other disciplines will satisfy the same requirements. Combined with the (misguided) reputation for being "useless," this can cause a suppression in enrollment compared to other disciplines. Additionally, the recent trend in this state to effectively revise our mission statement so as to promote remediation and transfer exclusively (at the expense of valuing "life-long learners") could create downward pressure on enrollment for courses, such as philosophy, often regarded as less practical.

Success Rate: As described under "Characteristics, Performance, and Trends," success rates for PHIL courses remain lower than that of the College, in general. As stated above, this is disappointing, but unsurprising. The retention rate of philosophy courses is slightly higher than the College average, suggesting that more students "fail" philosophy courses by virtue of actually staying in the course, rather than dropping it (as already discussed above). Moreover, the abstract thinking, analytical skills, and rigorous argumentation required by philosophy courses renders them notoriously "difficult" classes. Given that we have no prerequisites (for most of our courses), and allow students to enroll regardless of their background and preparation level, it is to be expected that many will find the courses more difficult than that to which they are accustomed. Nevertheless, as previously noted, this gap is shrinking, and our success rate is improving considerably.

Program's Opportunities

Explore the increasing applicability of technology in the classroom: Virtually all philosophy courses are directly aided by audio-visual modalities. We routinely use the Internet to show video clips available online, Powerpoint for clear presentations, and movies to demonstrate and explain particular themes. We plan to further integrate, where applicable, these instruments, and others to foster a better learning experience for our students. The "Elmo" we have requested every year for the past several years would be of great value, especially for Critical Thinking and Logic courses. It is admittedly frustrating that this modest request has been ignored/declined each year for A208, while every single classroom at SWEC and EMEC comes already equipped with the same technology. It is even more frustrating to use this technology off the main campus, see that it enables further student understanding, yet the main campus cannot seem to find the resources.

Explore the ways various philosophy courses can be helpful and integral to other new degree programs: Sociology and Psychology both considered adopting PHIL110 (Critical Thinking) for inclusion in their respective majors. While Sociology did not (ultimately) incorporate any PHIL courses in their degree, Psychology included both PHIL 110 and PHIL 101/101H as options for their degree. Nearly all of our courses are included in the General Studies degree, including most of the "with emphasis in" variants. With new majors being actively desired by the college administration, we are at a unique time in the history of the institution, and the philosophy program intends to be included in as many relevant degree options as is appropriate.

Experiment with additional classroom space: Philosophy has just recently acquired the use of an additional classroom, allowing us to offer more sections of philosophy at high demand times. Thus far, the competition between sections has not diminished enrollment, but both competing sections fill to capacity. Indeed, our fill rates for Fall and Spring terms range from 98%-102%. This shows the high level of demand for philosophy courses, and warrants further experimentation with the additional space.

Develop additional online/hybrid course offerings (i.e., PHIL 110, 124, 126, 128, 140--see "goal #7): These additional means of offering our program courses give us greater flexibility and options so as to meet student needs in the midst of budget constraints.

Program's Threats

Budget cuts: our program was cut 24% for the Spring 2013 term. As a result, we taught a total of 11 sections that term. Should this last for more than a term or two, our program will certainly stagnate, if not decline. As of Fall 2013, we have been told to expect similar dismal offerings in Spring 2014. It is only because Dixon is now the chair of the curriculum committee, and therefore has significant reassigned time, that we are able to retain our lecturer pool at all. Even with that reassign "cushion," we have lost all but one lecturer for Spring terms, and his course offerings depend largely on the availability of additional sections from SWEM or EMEC. We were pleased to have finally found an

excellent lecturer poised to take on regular adjunct responsibilities for our program, but we fear that we will lose him in the very near future solely as a result of our inability to offer him sections on a reliable basis. Our ability to offer a variety of courses in a variety of mediums and at a variety of times is thereby diminished. Given such drastic cuts, the total number of sections is diminished, but so too will be our ability to offer the specialty courses required for our AA degree(s). As a result, interest in and completion of our degree program will diminish.

Classroom space: Although we recently acquired an additional classroom, should we ever lose access to that room, our capacity for growth and our ability to satisfy student demand will be stifled. We turn away scores of students every semester who wish to add our already-full sections. We have already begun experimenting with non-traditional time slots, and have met with success. It is an undeniable fact, however, that without additional classrooms, the program will never achieve its true potential

Technology replacement: It is important that our current equipment (desktop computers, laptops, classroom projectors, etc.) be replaced on a regular, continuing basis. The increased use of media resources (e.g., Internet video clips) requires fast computers with sufficient processing power. Without regular updates, technological failures or deficiencies will interfere with teaching, grading, SLO evaluation, etc.

Library resources: Access to the online resource JSTOR would allow numerous and varied primary resources to be used at will by students and instructors. The library has been generally effective at addressing our more urgent needs. We request only that this continues.

Support staff: This challenge is shared by all programs housed within the Social Sciences and Humanities Division. For all the sections our Division offers, we have only one full-time secretary to assist with record keeping, logistical tasks, faculty support, as well as student needs. To maintain efficiency and to continue to provide excellent service to students, we do not merely desire more support staff, we need it. The recent addition of part-time clerical support has helped, but it's essential that this position at least be maintained, if not upgraded to full-time.

Record-keeping: The task of preparing for courses, continually revising and improving course offerings, lecturing, mentoring, and grading, and participating in various clubs or committees all aimed at maintaining or improving the quality of education received at RHC is becoming considerably more difficult due to the exponentially increasing demands from SLOs, annual program plans, etc. In the last several years, instructors have been required to create, implement, record, and analyze course level SLOs and program level SLOs. Soon, institutional SLOs will be added to the mix. Program review has always been a significant task, but occurred only every few years. Now, program plans have been added as an annual task. These plans require data analysis from both SLOs as well as institutional information—all of which must be addressed in written reports. Simply put, instructors are being asked to do a lot more, and it is coming at the expense of classroom and program needs. The many hours spent preparing each report, assessing SLO reports, etc., are hours that could have been devoted to course

preparation, timely grading, course revisions, club sponsorship, etc. It appears that the trend promises still more similar work in the future. The more that instructors are asked to do outside the classroom, the less time they have for the classroom. While recognizing the role of most of this for accreditation purposes, it would appear that either a reduced teaching load, or at least an increase in salary, is warranted.