DePaul University Academic Program Review

Cycle 3: Spring 2000--Spring 2001

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT – JUNE 2001

Department of Philosophy

As a result of the third cycle of DePaul University's Academic Program Review Process (Cycle 3), the participants in the process enter into the following agreements. The participants understand that this document will be available to be made public once all the signatures are in place.

Actions agreed upon for the coming academic year

1. Curriculum and Pedagogy

   a. Teaching Practicum. The department instituted a more intensified and focused structure for the Teaching Practicum to better prepare graduate students to teach introductory-level Philosophy courses in the undergraduate program. The Practicum has been meeting once per quarter; now it will be made into a 10-week course beginning in the Fall of 2001-2002. The director of the Practicum program will do in-class visitation to the classrooms of these graduate student instructors to assess their progress. The Department will follow the success of the Teaching Practicum in the coming year.

   b. Prerequisites. The Philosophy department would like to require that students have at least some introduction to the process and methods of Philosophy before they do advanced coursework in the 200- and 300-level courses. Therefore the department will consider making PHL 100 a prerequisite for all 200-level courses. The dean noted that deciding upon and enforcing prerequisites was ultimately the department’s decision, but he recommended that the department base the decision on evidence that students who had taken the prerequisites performed better in subsequent courses. The department agreed to study the issue of course sequencing and timing more closely in the coming year, especially how different types of students move through and perform in upper-level courses (see c. below).

   c. Students in Philosophical Inquiry Domain courses. The department is concerned about how the enrollment of both Philosophy majors and non-majors in Philosophical Inquiry domain courses affect the content and structure of those courses. In the coming year, the department will examine how different types of students (e.g. majors vs. non-majors; those who have taken PHL 100 vs. those who have not) experience these courses. This study would inform the decision to make PHL 100 a prerequisite. The AVP for Academic Affairs suggested that the department could work with Office of Institutional Planning and Research to do targeted studies to analyze student performance in courses based on the students’ course histories. The results of assessment of student learning in these courses could also inform the department about how different types of students progress through the undergraduate courses.

   d. Course Evaluations. The department has decided to revise its current course evaluation form. The revised form will be discussed at a June 2001 departmental meeting, and the new form will be implemented to evaluate Philosophy courses in the Fall 2001 quarter.
e. Perceptions of Program. After conducting a graduate student survey as part of review, the department learned that graduate students were troubled by alumni’s perceptions that the Philosophy PhD program was too narrowly focused on post-1800 Continental Philosophy with too little attention being paid to the history of Philosophy. While the department notes that this perception is not necessarily a fact about the program, it is already working to correct the misperception through better marketing of the program to external audiences such as through the printed material about the program and through the web-page.

2. Assessment

a. The department will focus initial assessment efforts on examining what students are actually learning in PHL 100. The improved course evaluation form should help instructors better understand what is successful and what needs to be improved about the courses. The results of this assessment should inform ongoing discussions about prerequisites and course sequencing.

b. The department has a three-year plan for assessing student learning which will begin next year. In the first year, the department will collect and examine syllabi for Philosophy 100 courses and will analyze samples of student work according to a faculty-designed rubric. The second year, this process will be repeated for Philosophy 200 courses; in the third year, the assessment will focus on Business Ethics courses.

c. In addition to assessing student coursework, the department’s Undergraduate Affairs Committee will also continue to interview students about their experiences in the program and will work to improve aspects of the program to benefit students.

d. As it develops its assessment plan, the department will articulate more definite goals with respect to what students should be learning in the program.

Issues on which there is joint commitment to continue working

1. Advising

a. The department is committed to defining more definite goals with respect to advising, especially regarding how students are assigned an advisor, and how often students should be required to meet with their advisor. The department will consider requiring students to meet with an advisor before they can declare themselves a Philosophy major. The Undergraduate Affairs committee will continue to discuss this issue next year.
b. The department will draw up a proposal regarding the duties and responsibilities of the Undergraduate Studies Director and submit it to the dean for consideration. The continuation of the course reduction will be discussed.

2. Faculty

The department will continue to discuss with the dean the issue of decreased faculty workload in general (from seven to six courses per year) for Philosophy instructors by means of ‘creative’ counting, such as weighting large sections of PHL 100 more when counting course loads. The Chair will file a proposal to the dean in the Fall of 2001 that would collapse two large sections of PHL 100 into one, using first-year graduate teaching fellows and allowing a faculty member to have the section count as 2 of the 7 course load.

3. Administrative Matters

a. PeopleSoft. The department will continue to work with the PeopleSoft transition teams, and the LA&S College Office to develop a method to count double majors.

b. The department notes that there is a delay in processing the “declaration of major” forms, which interferes with advising. The dean suspected that the back-up was due to the overload in clerical and administrative duties in the College office related to PeopleSoft, and he agreed to address this problem.

c. The department will continue discussing with the dean the possibility of increased staff support for the Graduate Alumni Placement Services. One issue is the burden of the clerical task of collecting, maintaining, copying, and mailing out student dossiers. The dean agreed to consider proposals for improved staffing, but noted that the department should seek assistance from the University’s central Placement office in the dossier task, which should be resolvable somewhat quickly.

Issues noted for further discussion

1. Institutional leadership. This is not as much an issue for further discussion, as it is an accomplishment to be noted. The dean recognizes that the department has become a centrally-involved department in the life of the College and of the University in general and commends them for their leadership. The department’s involvement is integral to the First Year Program, to the Liberal Studies Program. The department offered three conferences during the 2000-2001 academic year: African Philosophy, Minding the Borders, and Hannah Arendt: Eichmann in Jerusalem.

2. CTA U-Passes for Graduate Students. The LA&S Graduate students do not receive the option to have the discounted rate fare cards for students to use the Chicago Transit Authority trains & busses. The university and college explored this, surveyed the LA&S graduate students, who indicated they did not want to pay the increased student service fee associated with this benefit (all students must pay regardless of their use of the CTA). Therefore the university made its decision based on the student feedback.
However, the department suggests that at some point, the university may want to undertake another survey, if there are sufficient indications that graduate perceptions and needs have changed on this issue.

3. The APR subcommittee noted that maintaining academic quality and rigor while keeping the university and courses open to all students was an inherent challenge that the university should acknowledge. It was suggested that this matter may need college or even university attention.

University-level Issues and Commitments

During Cycle 3, the unit program review self-studies raised several issues that have important university-wide implications. In subsequent conversations about these major issues, the units, the deans, the Academic Program Review Committee members, and the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs all have recognized the need for university-level coordination in the following areas: a) developing appropriate staffing models to support growth; b) assisting units in the transition to the PeopleSoft student administrative system and in getting the maximum benefits from it, such as identifying and counting double majors, enforcing prerequisites, and securing better information and support for student advising; c) providing research assistance to units through university-level research offices; d) improving support for advising, especially in light of PeopleSoft; e) facilitating cross-college collaboration within DePaul with respect to new programs of study. To follow up on these common issues and determine the appropriate courses of action needed to address them at the university and unit level, the Academic Program Review Committee and the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs agree to do the following:

1. The Academic Program Review Committee agrees to prepare a summary report on Cycle 3 to the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs which discusses these and other issues that have important connections to other university-wide initiatives. That report will be made public, along with the Memoranda of Agreement.

2. The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs agrees to direct the appropriate university-level offices to work with the units and their deans to determine how to effectively address these issues.

3. The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs will require a progress report in June of 2002 from the appropriate university offices that will be shared with the Academic Program Review Committee.

Acknowledgements

The APRC thanks the unit’s review committee for its work in this cycle. The APR subcommittee commented that the Philosophy Department did a very good job going through the process and should be commended for their efforts. The EVP also thanks those involved in APR for making this process work. It is an important part of the university’s monitoring and maintaining academic quality.
A hard copy of this document was signed by:

Chair of the Unit Review Committee

Department Chair/Program Director

Chair of APRC Subcommittee

Chair of APRC

Dean of the College

Associate V.P. for Academic Affairs

Executive V.P. for Academic Affairs

*The hard copy with signatures is on file in the Office of the Associate V.P. for Academic Affairs and is available upon request.