

# Implementation Report on the 2017-2018 Cyclical Review of the BA and MA in Philosophy

**Authored by:** Gary Foster, Chair of the Department of Philosophy

**Date:** April 8, 2021

## INTRODUCTION

This is the first implementation report for the Philosophy (BA, MA) cyclical review that took place in 2017-2018. For each recommendation, the full language from the External Reviewers' Report has been included, along with the corresponding information about implementation from the Final Assessment Report. For each recommendation, the unit has provided an update on the progress or action made toward the implementation of that recommendation, followed by comments from the relevant dean(s) and the Program Review Sub-Committee. Taking into account the updates provided by the unit and the comments from the dean(s), the Program Review Sub-Committee will review the report and determine if all recommendations have been implemented satisfactorily or if a subsequent report will be required.

## RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZED FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

<p><b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report: Recommendation #2:</b> We applaud the Department's commitment to enhancing experiential learning, but we recommend that it explore ways to connect students to the community. That could mean getting students out of the classroom to work in various ways in the community, or it could mean finding ways to bring the community into the classroom. Again, the details are best left to the department, but some concrete suggestions include: sending undergraduate students to their high schools to talk about key social issues, include as a component of topical ethical and social and political classes outreach to the local community, including, as appropriate, recent immigrants, marginalized populations, the elderly to participate in debates and discussions. Both approaches could also help advance the goal of diversifying the curriculum and the voices heard in the department. Social media can also be a tool of active learning. Some ideas here include a student run blog, creative use of twitter to disseminate the results of class discussions, and a student run Facebook pages that draws the public into philosophical debates.</p>		
Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)	Responsibility for Implementation	Anticipated Completion Date
Recommendation #2: Experiential Learning	Department	September 2019

**Unit Update:** We have had discussions about how we might best implement experiential learning opportunities. Opportunities for students to connect with the community have been more limited during the past academic year due to the pandemic, but prior to this we done the following: We have invited high school students to visit our classes in order to get a sense of what it would be like to study Philosophy at university. In Winter 2019, Dr. Ashwani Peetush piloted an experiential learning component in his course PP480D: Philosophy of

Multiculturalism. He had a representative from Laurier’s Community and Workplace Partnerships speak to his class about volunteer opportunities. Dr. Byron Williston has given a number of talks to groups outside of the university, particularly on the issue of climate change ethics. Here are some talks he has done since the 2017-2018 Review: April 3, 2019 – “Why Climate Change is an Ethical Issue” at St. George’s Anglican Church, New Hampshire, ON; January 29, 2019 – “Is Geoengineering the Solution to the Climate Crisis?”, Third Age Learning, Waterloo, ON; January 22, 2019 – “The Ethical Challenge of Climate Change,” Third Age Learning, Waterloo, ON; May 27, 2018 “Homo Deus: The Moral Challenge of Geoengineering,” Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, ON. I (Dr. Gary Foster) have also given a couple of interviews to local media sources, discussing my area of expertise. I was interviewed by both CBC Radio – Kitchener-Waterloo and CTV Kitchener to discuss my research on love and identity for their Valentine’s Day broadcasts on February 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The department continues to look for meaningful ways for both faculty and students to interact with the community and is committed to doing so on an ongoing basis as relevant opportunities are identified.

**FOA Decanal Comments:** There is a distinction between community engagement and experiential learning. The Department has done a fine job with the former, but I would encourage it to continue to explore ways to provide students with experiential learning opportunities as per the recommendation. It is worth considering how the Department might discuss with undergraduate students themselves about ways they might apply their learning about Philosophy in practical ways. It is necessary to take cautious but distinct steps to address this matter to align with University priorities.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The committee applauds the department’s efforts towards increasing community engagement opportunities for its undergraduate students, but also agrees with the Dean of Arts that community engagement is just one form of experiential learning. In addition to the suggestion provided by the Dean that the department consult with students about the forms of experiential learning that they would find most valuable. The committee also recommends that the department connect with Community and Workplace Partnerships at Laurier to discuss ideas for expanding its experiential learning opportunities for students. Based on the comments provided by the dean, the committee would like the department to provide an update on this recommendation in a subsequent report.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers’ Report: Recommendation #3:</b> We understand the Department’s concern that introducing pre-requisites at the 200-level is negatively impacting service enrollment, but we recommend against precipitous judgment. Thus, we recommend that the current policy be maintained as a pilot project for 2-3 years. If enrolments do not increase and concern about numbers persists, then the pre-requisites could be removed and a 200-level course reserved for majors could be introduced (assuming room could be created in the curriculum for it). This move would address the concern that allowing everyone in to 200-level courses “waters down” the philosophical challenge for majors, while allowing the department to maintain the very high number of non-majors that it teaches.			
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>	<b>Additional Notes</b>
Recommendation #3:	Department	September 2020	Two more years of retaining these prerequisites should provide sufficient

			information for the Department to make a decision.
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**Unit Update:** The department gave serious consideration to this recommendation, but our attempts to offer 200-level courses with pre-requisites, while admirable in theory, did not work out so well in practice. The classes that required prerequisites (e.g., PP207, PP225, and PP229) suffered from low enrollment and were therefore not sustainable. We have removed the prerequisites in order to achieve a sustainable enrolment in these courses. We believe that we do not currently have enough majors or instructors to justify a 200-level “majors only” course at this time but will continue to monitor this issue in the future.

**FOA Decanal Comments:** The Department has carefully considered this recommendation and I support their conclusion.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The comments provided indicate that completion of this recommendation was determined not to be feasible by either the department or the dean. With the dean’s support of the direction that the department has taken, the committee does not require any further reporting on this recommendation.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers’ Report: Recommendation #6:</b> We recommend that the Department re-think its on-line course offerings. They simply duplicate what is already offered in the classroom (and philosophy is best taught live and in person, in our view). There may be good reason for this duplication, but we did not hear it. In the absence of one, students taking the classes on line might be better served in the classroom.		
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>
Recommendation #6: Online course strategy	Department	September 2019

**Unit Update:** We agree, in principle, with the reviewers concerns here. As a department, we would prefer to have more on-campus courses as we too, believe that “philosophy is best taught live and in person.” Our chief concern in this regard, however, is that decreasing the number of online courses we offer will decrease the number of students we teach and the number of students we teach, as far as we know, is an important consideration from both the FOA and the university’s perspective. Most of our online courses have higher caps than their equivalent on-campus version and are almost exclusively taught by CTF members. We have taken some concrete steps though to address the issue raised by the review committee. We are going to lower the course capacity for our very popular PP201OC (Reasoning and Argumentation) during the winter term of 2022 from 175 students to 100 students since it competes directly with both our own on-campus version of the course (capped at 100) and the on-campus version at Laurier’s Brantford campus. This will be a pilot project to see if the reduced cap has a positive impact on the enrollment in the on-campus versions of the course. If it does, we may try this with some other courses as well. During the past two academic years where students have been learning almost entirely remotely, the department’s availability of well-designed online courses has worked to our advantage.

**FOA Decanal Comments:** It would be worth distinguishing which type of course attracts Majors and which is more popular as an elective format. The Faculty of Arts needs to manage its elective offerings to ensure that there are enough sections to support both Arts students and those from other faculties. However, priority must be to ensure as much face-to-face course delivery to Majors. We must continue our analysis of the data and wait to see the impact of the Department’s current pilot project.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** Determining the ideal balance of intramural and online course offerings to support both majors and provide service to the broader Faculty and university represents an ongoing initiative, rather than something that can be easily completed. The department has identified steps that it has taken to implement this recommendation on a pilot basis. The committee feels that further discussions on this recommendation can be left to the department and the dean, and does not require further reporting on it.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers’ Report: Recommendation #8:</b> We recommend that the existing structure of the program be maintained and that the department not develop a 1 year, course only option. (p.9, Question 3, Self-Study).		
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>
Recommendation #8: Maintain graduate program structure	Department	September 2019

**Unit Update:** The department agreed with this recommendation, and has maintained the existing structure of the MA in Philosophy program, which is a one-year research-based program. We consider this recommendation to be satisfied.

**FOA Decanal Comments:** I support the Department’s decision in this regard.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** The Department agrees with the recommendation, and this is supported by FGPS.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** No further reporting on this recommendation is required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers’ Report: Recommendation #9:</b> We recommend that the idea to create a public philosophy component (option three, p. 26, Self-Study) actively be pursued. Requiring all graduate students to attend, and write a reflective paper about, some issue of pressing public concern would be a unique form of experiential learning, demonstrate the public relevance of philosophy to the community, and serve as a valuable recruitment tool. Moreover, since the community is diverse, having students engage with and respond to community concerns should also help advance the goal of diversity.		
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>
Recommendation #9: Public Philosophy component in graduate program	Department	September 2020

**Unit Update:** To act upon this recommendation, our Graduate Officer, Dr. Neil Campbell, has made a proposal to this effect twice in the past five years at the departmental level. To date, we have not been able to agree about “how” or “if” we might implement this recommendation. This partly due to the concern about how this component could be managed without additional resources from faculty members as our FT faculty complement is already stretched. The concern has to do with the tension between the value of a public philosophy component vs the value of having sufficient academic course content (currently we have six MA seminars, one of which is our MRP seminar). We will revisit it and emphasize the reviewers’ recommendation at this year’s annual departmental retreat on June 1st. Until we can come to an agreement on how this would work and on what resources we can direct towards it, we cannot implement it.

**FOA Decanal Comments:** I encourage the Department to continue these discussions and to explain what resources might be necessary to support what could be a valuable experiential learning opportunity for graduate students.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** The value of implementing the recommendation is strong and appears worthy of pursuing. Perhaps the Department could consider co-instruction and instructional contributions from a graduate student teaching assistantship to reduce the burden on any one faculty member.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** It is clear from the comments provided by both the Dean of Arts and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies that there is value in continuing to pursue this recommendation within the department. The department Chair is encouraged to share the decanal comments with faculty, and identify ways in which the recommendation could be implemented in advance of the next cyclical review. This recommendation seems aligned with Recommendation #2, and based on the deans’ comments, the committee would like to have an update on the status of the implementation of this recommendation in a subsequent report.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers’ Report: Recommendation #10:</b> We recommend that the Department, in consultation with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, explore ways to increase annual enrollment from 7-8 to 10-12 students. We make further recommendations below about ways that the funding package might be enhanced as an aid to recruitment.			
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>	<b>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</b>
Recommendation #10: Increase graduate program enrolment	Department	September 2020	Dean of Arts

**Unit Update:** Our Graduate Officer has been working to promote the program (see #11 below), although we have faced some challenges in this respect. One of the major challenges has been the funding offers we have been able to make to applicants. They have often not been competitive with offers from programs at other universities. Some years we have had excellent applicants who have not accepted our offers; we assume this is because they have been offered more attractive funding packages elsewhere. As well, we were only allocated

four funded spots by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies this past year, making it difficult to grow the program (they did end up letting us fund five students which, our Graduate Officer tells me, is normal). Although the graduate program has not experienced growth since the cyclical review, our MA students have done very well. We have had two gold medal winners (Janet Jones, 2019 and Jamie Tuck, 2020) since the 2017-2018 cyclical review. Listing the prize winners on our website is something we are in the process of doing. Our MA program yearly enrollment since the review has been: 2020-2021 (5), 2019-2020 (5), and 2018-2019 (7). The department would be happy to see the graduate program enrollment increase, and will continue to work with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies to explore ideas and avenues for doing so.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** To increase competitiveness of funding packages and to attract the best graduate students, FGPS recommends that faculty in the Department offer studentships and research assistantships via research grants if this isn't already occurring. The recommendation to increase annual enrolment to 10-12 exceeds the faculty complement in the Department and is therefore perhaps not very realistic at this time.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The committee thanks the department for outlining the ways in which it has tried to implement this recommendation, and to the FGPS for identifying barriers to its realization. The committee recommends that the department continue to work with FGPS on ways to increase graduate program enrolment that are manageable for the current faculty complement. This recommendation represents an ongoing initiative for the department, and no further reporting is required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report: Recommendation #11:</b> We recommend that the Department advertise its MA more aggressively to students at other Canadian and American schools. This campaign should be developed in conjunction with our recommendations above regarding web-site design, alumni outreach, and external funding applications.			
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>	<b>Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)</b>
Recommendation #11: Advertising of graduate program	Department	September 2019	With assistance from FGPS

**Unit Update:** Our Graduate Office, Dr. Neil Campbell has undertaken several initiatives for advertising our graduate program in response to this recommendation. During winter 2021, we held an alumni panel on Zoom to promote our MA program. This was organized by Dr. Campbell and Dr. Jill Rusin. The panel was made up of five of our MA alumni (four of whom were also undergraduate alumni from our program). The participants consisted of two alumni who are currently practicing law, one who is an assistant professor in Philosophy and Gender Studies/Feminist Research at McMaster University (tenure track), one who works as a bioethicist and clinician-scientist at the University Health Network, Toronto, and the other who is now doing a PhD in Philosophy at McMaster and is a Graduate Research assistant at McMaster's Institute on Ethics and Policy for Innovation. In addition to this, the brochure for our MA program was revamped under Dr. Campbell's guidance, but COVID-19 prevented us from using the brochures effectively in a mail-out campaign. This recommendation is one that the department considers ongoing. We are committed to it, but we consider it completed for the purposes of the review.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** These are good initiatives. Perhaps the brochure could be digitally distributed to undergraduate departments and career development centres at other universities during the fall term, in advance of the early winter term application deadline. FGPS encourages the graduate coordinator to reach out to our new Communications Coordinator, once hired, to assist with this and developing other program advertising initiatives.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The committee appreciates the examples provided by the department about the ways in which it has addressed this recommendation made by the review committee. The committee supports the ideas raised by FGPS about ways to continue this momentum, and encourages the department to follow through on the suggestion to connect with the Communications Coordinator. No further reporting on this recommendation is required.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers’ Report: Recommendation #13:</b> We recommend that tenured faculty work with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, the Office of Research Services, and their own colleagues who have been successful winning awards from granting agencies, to develop a systematic plan for increasing application rates. Increases in external funding will generate a new pool of resources for the department, some of which could be used to fund research assistantships. In turn, these assistantships can be used as a recruitment tool for Graduate students and another way of developing experiential learning opportunities for graduate and (perhaps) senior undergraduate students.		
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>
Recommendation #13: Work with Office of Research Services on external funding opportunities	Department	September 2019

**Unit Update:** The department has engaged with this recommendation in multiple ways. We have invited Rachel Barken from the Office of Research Services to a department meeting in the fall of 2020. She presented us with information regarding various research funding opportunities. A few of us have also held individual meetings with Rachel. Dr. Byron Williston was awarded the following grant: Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC), Insight Development Grant. Project: “Nation-Building in a New Epoch: The Canadian Challenge.” 2019-2022 (extended to 2022 due to COVID-19). Dr. Williston hired an MA student as a research assistant for this project. Dr. Neil Campbell applied for a two-year Insight Development Grant (SSHRC) that includes RA funding for one MA student each year. The grant was to help him develop and account of reactive attitudes that draws on recent work in the philosophy of emotion in order to clarify P.F. Strawson’s claim that our proneness to such emotions constitutes our interpersonal relationships. We believe that these efforts satisfy the intent of this recommendation, which will continue to prioritize within the department on an ongoing basis.

**FOA Decanal Comments:** Not all areas of research require large research grants and this is not the only measure of faculty research productivity. Nonetheless, I encourage faculty to apply for grants in order to be able to provide senior undergraduate and graduate students with more opportunities to have hands-on experience in research.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** Congratulations on the SSHRC grants, and it is good to learn that these grants have been used to support graduate students. External research grants are critical for providing research opportunities

for graduate students and their recruitment, and to support graduate student professional skills development beyond meeting their academic requirements (e.g., presenting at conferences). FGPS encourages faculty members to seek collaborative opportunities in their continued pursuit of external grants.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** The department has provided concrete examples of ways in which it has worked towards implementing this recommendation. No further reporting is required, but the department is encouraged to continue to engage with the intent of the recommendation on an ongoing basis.

<b>Full Recommendation from External Reviewers' Report: Recommendation #15:</b> We recommend that the Department develop an internal plan for the development of the website as a tool of community outreach and recruitment. Specifically, the website could highlight the achievements of undergraduate and graduate alumni (thus also helping build stronger links with them), provide up to date announcements about departmental initiatives and events of interest to the Laurier and civic communities, and highlight the achievements of faculty and (especially) students.		
<b>Recommendation to be Implemented (from Final Assessment Report)</b>	<b>Responsibility for Implementation</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion Date</b>
Recommendation #15: Develop stronger web presence for programs	Department	January 2020

**Unit Update:** There have been significant improvements to the department's web presences since the cyclical review. We now have a web officer who has been responsible for reviewing and updating our website on a regular basis. We are using the website to advertise our departmental talks, as well as adding testimonials from both undergraduate and MA alumni to promote our programs. We are currently adding what will become a regular section for student and faculty achievements (gold medal winners, scholarships, grants, publications). We believe that this recommendation has been completed and that the quality and currency of the department's website has improved considerably

**FOA Decanal Comments:** The Department has done a fine job responding to this request and I encourage it to continue to maintain a strong presence via the web.

**FGPS Decanal Comments:** Recommendations for improvement of the Department website are in the process of being met. With any website, it will be important to maintain content and to ensure that it is current. These efforts will contribute to more effective promotion of the program, current events and accomplishments.

**Program Review Sub-Committee Comments:** Maintaining an up-to-date website represents an ongoing initiative, but this recommendation is considered completed for reporting purposes.

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

**Unit:** Since the cyclical review, we have been working as a department to address the recommendations that the review committee made. We have, as the review committee acknowledged, been doing quite a lot with a limited number of full-time members. We have been running both a BA and MA program, which have graduated some excellent students who have gone on to make Laurier proud. Several of our MA students have gone on to



do PhD work in Philosophy and both our BA and MA students who engaged in exciting careers such as law, medicine, mental health services, bioethics, working for city of Hamilton and the city of Guelph, and so on. We have also recently become part of the Sussex Law program. Our first Laurier Philosophy Sussex Law cohort are currently finishing their first year in the program. We currently have a lot going on in the department and our members continue to carry on productive research programs. This year has been challenging due to the pandemic, which has limited us in terms of new initiatives. We believe that all of the reviewers' recommendations prioritized by the deans have either been completed, or represent ongoing work that we are committed to continuing over the coming academic years leading up to the next review.

**FOA Dean:** The Department has exciting potential as it begins to work with its first cohort of Sussex Law students. I encourage it to invest in this group of students and to provide as much support as possible in order to ensure their success. The pandemic has made it challenging to move forward on a number of fronts, and Philosophy faculty members are to be commended for their hard work and commitment to ensure a high quality education that engages with students and takes into account their needs throughout this time.

**FGPS Dean:** The Implementation Report contains a number of new initiatives and advances, in response to the recommendations, which the Department should be proud of especially during the challenges of the past year. There are likely opportunities where FGPS and, in particular, our Communications Coordinator (once hired), can continue to assist with the promotion of the MA program. FGPS encourages the graduate coordinator to reach out to discuss these possibilities.

**Program Review Sub-Committee:** The committee appreciates the details provided by the department about the ways in which they have engaged with and worked towards implementing the recommendations made by the review committee in the 2017-2018 cyclical review. It is recognized that during the pandemic, making progress on some of these initiatives was not able to be a priority. The committee considered the majority of the recommendations to have been completed, but would like to see an additional Implementation Report completed in a year's time in order to provide an update on the status of Recommendation #2 and Recommendation #9, which have been identified by the deans as recommendations where further progress can be made.

**Subsequent Report Required: Yes**

**Due Date: January 13, 2023**