

10 November 2008

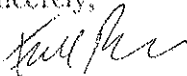
Prof. Suzanne Ortega, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs,
University of New Mexico
Prof. Brenda Claiborne, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of New Mexico
Prof. John Taber, Chair, Department of Philosophy, University of New Mexico

Dear Professors Ortega, Claiborne, and Taber,

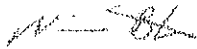
We thank you for the opportunity to review the Philosophy Department at the University of New Mexico. It was an illuminating and pleasant experience for all of us, and we are happy to be able to contribute to the flourishing of a strong department that is clearly contributing so much to the University and to our profession. Thank you as well for the assistance and the hospitality you and your colleagues provided during our visit. You made it easy for us to do our job.

Enclosed please find our final report. We have all reviewed the report and we are in complete consensus regarding its contents. We hope very much that it will be of use to the Philosophy Department, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the University. If we can provide any further information or advice, please let us know. We wish you and the Department all the best.


Sincerely,




Frederick Beiser
Professor of Philosophy, Syracuse University



William Blattner
Professor of Philosophy, Georgetown University



Eva Caldera
Research Professor, School of Law Administration, University of New Mexico


Jay L. Garfield

Doris Silbert Professor in the Humanities and Professor of Philosophy, Smith College
Professor, Graduate Faculty of Philosophy, University of Massachusetts
Professor of Philosophy, University of Melbourne
Adjunct Professor of Philosophy, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies

I. General Introduction

We are pleased to say that the Philosophy department at the University of New Mexico is in very good shape. The self-study is comprehensive and accurate, addresses nearly all of the relevant issues, and was a very useful guide to this committee. The department impressed us as a happy, collegial enterprise harboring active research and committed and talented teachers. The department has a strong cadre of prominent senior philosophers, and has recently hired a very promising corps of talented junior faculty members. These young philosophers impressed us with their energy, commitment and are clearly comfortable and happy in the department. There is simply no dead wood in this department.

The department is flourishing, and is close to achieving a significant national profile. The UNM philosophy department has three prominent areas of specialization: classical Indian philosophy, the history of Modern philosophy, especially 19th and 20th Century European philosophy. We believe that with a few specific, cost-effective and straightforward enhancements, this department could become a leading philosophy department in these distinctive areas of specialization.

Specifically, we here recommend the following steps:

- A substantial increase in the number of graduate teaching assistantships assigned the department;
- Increased attention to primary language instruction for graduate students in modern European philosophy;
- Enhancement of the social and academic atmosphere of the graduate program;
- Attention to diversity in hiring and recruitment of graduate students and faculty.
- Adopt outcomes assessment measures that are less onerous and more specifically tuned to stages of students' education.

We encourage the university and the department to take these steps, which we outline in more detail below, to move to this next level. It is crucial that the department receive adequate university support in this process, despite the financial strictures under which the college operates.

II. The Profile of the Department

We note that in the self-study and in conversations with department members, the department tends to think of itself as a chain of philosophical boutiques, including the classical Indian team; a continental team; an American team; an analytic team; and a history of philosophy team. We find this both a misleading characterization of the actual practice of the department, and a less attractive public presentation than the reality justifies. It may well be that this self-conception reflects departmental history rather than current reality.

In fact, the department has a great deal more cohesion than this, and consequently more strength in the areas it addresses. We see the department as comprising a substantial and potentially very prominent team in the history of European philosophy, a fine team already nationally prominent in Indian philosophy. The idioms and methods of the faculty members working in “continental” and “analytic” philosophy as well as the history of philosophy are complementary instead of competing, issuing in a coherent, multi-perspectival approach to modern European and American philosophy. We urge the department in its self-understanding as well as its presentation to the profession, to emphasize this coherence. This will enhance perception of the department’s strength in this area, and will make it more attractive to potential faculty recruits and to graduate students who might be put off by a disjoint collection of smaller clusters.

III. The Undergraduate Program

The undergraduate curriculum is generally well-balanced, and is very well-taught. We are impressed with the organization of the introductory courses, and by the fact that the best teachers, often senior faculty members, some with teaching awards, are in the classroom teaching introductory courses. The department is to be commended for its dedication to teaching at all levels, and for its obvious success. The creative use of teaching assistants to provide discussion sections in Philosophy 101 benefits both those teaching those sections and the undergraduates who have the opportunity, in their first philosophy class, to *do* philosophy, rather than to observe it passively.

There are, however, some lacunae in the curriculum to note. The department could use more courses—in particular more advanced courses—in social and political philosophy and logic. It is odd to think that a student who wishes to go beyond the most elementary symbolic logic course would have to go elsewhere.

We are pleased to see that the department is undertaking a comprehensive renumbering of its undergraduate courses. The previous numbering system is not as clear as one would like regarding the level at which courses are pitched. But the new system, introduced in the catalog revisions, will make routes through the curriculum more transparent. We are also pleased that there will be less cross-listing of 300 and 500 level courses, allowing undergraduates to avoid courses with intimidating graduate students. The university should support these catalog changes so that they can be made as expeditiously as possible.

IV. The Graduate Program

The graduate students are high-quality and committed. The department provides very good graduate education. However, there are specific issues that need to be addressed to move this program from its current status to that of a nationally prominent, highly-successful program. Several of these were noted in the previous departmental review.

The previous review noted that language instruction for Indian philosophy students was, at that time, inadequate to support graduate level research. We are gratified that the department has completely remedied this situation, providing intensive Sanskrit training and reading groups for the students of Indian philosophy. Indeed, the students of European philosophy are envious of this opportunity, and properly so. Graduate research in German and French philosophy, no less than Indian philosophy, requires facility in reading texts in their original languages. Fortunately, basic training in French and German can be provided by the Foreign Languages Department; but what the graduate students need are seminars or informal reading groups led by philosophy faculty members, focusing on reading philosophical texts in their original language. This will not only enhance their own research and improve their dissertations; it will give them a much better chance on the job market. It is expected in this profession that scholars read the texts they study and teach in the original.

The previous review notes that “students complained of lack of feedback and advising.” Since that time the department has made real progress, especially with regard to more advanced students. They have completely implemented two of the recommendations of that study, viz., an annual review of each student, and an annual letter of evaluation. The department also does a very good job of preparing students for the job market. We find, however, that deficiencies in advising persist, particularly advising of students prior to the commencement of the dissertation. Advising at this level is perfunctory, and all students at this level are advised by a single advisor. We suggest that each incoming student is assigned a faculty advisor, chosen with reference to the student’s interests, and this advisor take personal responsibility for the student’s acculturation, academic progress and development as a teacher and a scholar. This is standard practice in the best graduate programs. It is important that as this is implemented it be understood as a shared responsibility, with advisees being assigned evenly to faculty members.

The previous review also noted that graduate teaching assistants are used disproportionately in Philosophy 156 (Critical Thinking). This remains the case. While this is a good course for TA’s to handle, it is important for graduate students to develop broader teaching competence in order to be competitive candidates for positions in philosophy. We urge the department to broaden the range of undergraduate courses open to graduate teaching assistants, particularly as those students mature as teachers.

The department is aware that its graduate seminar offerings are not sufficiently broad, and is taking some steps to improve that situation. One problem in the past has arisen from the practice of cross-listing graduate and undergraduate courses. This is disastrous. The undergraduates are intimidated; the graduate students are bored. Neither group is well-taught. The department has fixed this problem by decoupling these courses. However, as long as the graduate program remains at its current size, a second problem will persist: there are simply not enough graduate students to fill a broad enough range of seminars. We will propose an increase in the graduate student strength to solve this problem.

The previous review also notes a deficiency in morale and a sense of isolation among graduate students. We found this to be the case today, and this is a problem that the department must address. Gender imbalance in both the faculty and graduate student body exacerbates this situation for female graduate students, and positive steps to create a more comfortable and welcoming environment for them should be a priority. This requires deliberate departmental attention and commitment. It is noteworthy that there are some members of the department who students identify as especially welcoming and sensitive to the needs of female graduate students. These faculty members could lead in improving this situation.

The department should undertake regular occasions for social interaction among graduate students and faculty members. Casual opportunities often inadvertently exclude students. Visiting speakers could also be invited with the advice of graduate students, and graduate students should be invited to dinners with visiting speakers and given ample opportunities for interaction. These opportunities will both enhance morale and will allow graduate students valuable opportunities to interact with prominent philosophers, making contacts that can be professionally useful. (It came to our attention that funds supporting entertainment of guest speakers are limited; we therefore encourage the department to choose less expensive venues so that graduate students can be completely subsidized.)

Most of these problems can be solved or ameliorated by substantially increasing the size of the graduate program. We note at the outset that the current ratio of faculty to graduate students is low by historic and national standards. We advise a target graduate enrolment of approximately 40, comprising approximately 10-15 MA students and 25-30 PhD students. The department wisely does not admit PhD students it cannot support. This entails a university commitment to enough TAs assigned to the philosophy department to support 25-30 PhD students.

The expansion of the PhD program through additional TAships is the single most important recommendation we make, and is the key to moving the department forward and to creating a national class program for the university. This initiative would enable filling more graduate seminars, creating more diversity in the graduate curriculum; it would provide more TAs for undergraduate courses, freeing faculty members for research and enhancing the undergraduate curriculum through creating more discussion sections; it would provide a critical mass for a community with more solidarity; it would enable faculty members to teach more of their research to graduate students, thus supporting that research. These goals cannot be achieved simply through expanding the MA program, which is in fact a program properly designed to remediate inadequate undergraduate backgrounds or to support other areas of study. The proposal to allow Philosophy 156 to serve as a core writing course is an appropriate vehicle for at least partially accomplishing this.

We are disturbed by the fact the criteria and procedures for awarding Barrett dissertation research fellowships to graduate students are not transparent to graduate students. This is a cause of needless anxiety and distrust. The department should move immediately to

regularize this process and to disseminate the procedures and criteria for awarding these funds. (See the discussion of faculty research below for more on this issue.)

V. Research Profile and Assessment of Research

The University of New Mexico should be proud of the research accomplishments of the Department of Philosophy. The Department boasts leading senior scholars in classical Indian philosophy and has a core of younger scholars in 19th and 20th century European philosophy who complement senior scholars in the history of philosophy. Because the specialists in European philosophy are younger, the department has not yet established a national reputation in this area, but it will.

We note that the University is proposing a performance-based budgeting program that will involve detailed assessment of the department's research profile. This will require serious attention to the methodology used in cross-departmental comparisons, as publication patterns differ dramatically between disciplines, even between humanities disciplines. It is absolutely essential that if the university goes down this path (a path we advise it to avoid, given the costs of doing it right which are unlikely to be compensated by corresponding benefits, and given the damage that such models have done elsewhere) that these comparisons be done fairly. This requires that the university first compare each department against comparable departments in the same discipline and against the publication standards appropriate to its discipline to determine its disciplinary standing and on only *then* to compare departments against one another using their respective standings in their own discipline as the standard of comparison. Here we address the standing of the philosophy department *in philosophy*, and indicate the relevant departments against which it should be compared.

The Department's assessment of its research productivity in section VI.4 of its self-study is accurate: its faculty are highly productive, both in terms of the discipline-specific quantitative expectations within philosophy and in terms of our assessment of the quality. The self-study is correct to note that in philosophy quality is emphasized more than quantity. The best journals in the discipline sport acceptance rates in the single digits, and an acceptance rate over 20% generally compromises a journal's standing in the profession. The very best journals have acceptance rates of around 1-5%. Many professors of philosophy of international standing publish one high-quality journal article per year on average. It should also be noted that philosophers often publish in spurts, for example, three articles in a single year after a couple of years without publication. (Publications often emerge only when a research project has matured, as opposed to other disciplines where they represent progress reports as an ongoing project generates intermediate results.) Finally, as is also the case in other humanities disciplines, chapters of edited books are a standard and highly respected form of publication, and, unlike the sciences, monographs are highly respected. We therefore urge strongly that the New Mexico Philosophy Department be supported in encouraging its faculty to produce high quality, rather than high volume, output. This is the road to national and international standing.

The Self-Study invites us to consider against which other departments the Philosophy should compare itself in order to determine its standing within the profession. The Self-Study comments upon the fact that it does not appear in the “Philosophical Gourmet Report” rankings (aka the “Leiter Report”). This should cause no concern whatsoever. In the judgment of this committee the Leiter Report is unreliable and idiosyncratic, as well as primarily focused on “core analytic philosophy,” which is not a focus of the New Mexico department. (The “Leiter Report” is edited and controlled by Professor Brian Leiter of the University of Chicago Law School, and although we believe his intentions to be honest and his efforts at fairness considerable, rankings produced and edited by a single individual just do not represent a scientifically credible measurement device for university administrators.) There is no alternative than to use experts within the field to offer educated cross-departmental comparisons.

The Self-Study compares the department against the philosophy departments at Arizona State University and the University of Oklahoma in general, as well as Vanderbilt University for its program in European philosophy. In judging faculty research productivity, it uses the University of Colorado at Boulder. This may not be entirely appropriate. The philosophy departments at Arizona State and Oklahoma are of similar size and reside in the same region of the U.S., but they do not share focal areas with New Mexico’s department; nor does the department in Boulder. Vanderbilt University is a useful comparison department in this regard, as are Emory University, Georgetown University, Northwestern University, the University of Memphis, and the University of California at Riverside, for European philosophy. (The University of Texas at Austin used to be a prominent program in European philosophy, but is no longer.) *Vis-à-vis* Indian and Asian philosophy, the most useful comparison departments in philosophy are the University of Hawaii and the University of Texas at Austin, with some departments in Religious Studies worth considering.

European Philosophy. In European philosophy it is unfair to compare New Mexico against the wealthiest national leaders in the field, such as the University of Chicago, the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and Pennsylvania State University, or with the smaller programs offered by nationally prominent universities, such as those at Harvard University or New York University. The University of New Mexico competes directly with these institutions neither for graduate students nor for junior faculty hires.

Instead, the relevantly similar departments against which it makes sense to compare New Mexico are Emory University, Georgetown University, Northwestern University, the University of California at Riverside, the University of Memphis, and Vanderbilt University. All of these departments boast well-established senior scholars in the area and for this reason will receive more attention from the profession than New Mexico over the next five to ten years. The one exception to that is Northwestern, whose program is small and has suffered from faculty attrition. Emory, Memphis, and Vanderbilt are highly regarded programs in the more conventional form of “continental” philosophy, whereas New Mexico has focused its energies in the newer style of European philosophy that fuses received modes of thinking and methodologies. In this regard, New Mexico is most similar to Georgetown and Riverside.

By way of a straight-up comparison against these two departments, New Mexico's department fares very well: its faculty is younger and less well known, but has better overall coverage of the area. It is impossible to say at this point how well New Mexico's attempts to recruit prospective graduate students away from Georgetown and Riverside might be, but all indications are good. If the younger faculty at New Mexico realize their potential, they will represent a formidable coterie of faculty in this area with an exciting modern approach and method. We urge the University to support the Philosophy Department in its efforts at faculty development and research support, as well as the unavoidable struggles of faculty retention that beset up-and-coming departments.

With respect to measuring research in Indian philosophy, we suggest that, given the dearth of other philosophy departments in which research in Indian philosophy is pursued, that it would make sense to compare the UNM Indian philosophers' research profile with Indian philosophers not only housed in philosophy departments, such as those at the University of Hawai'i and the University of Texas, but also with the Indian philosophy groups in the University of Chicago Divinity School and Emory University, where research in Indian philosophy is active. One should bear in mind that these latter two departments are very well-funded, and housed in very wealthy universities. When compared against these departments, the University of New Mexico's department looks very good indeed. The publication rate and the quality of its publications compare very favourably with those of scholars at Hawai'i, Texas and Emory and approach those at Chicago. UNM takes graduate students away from Hawai'i already, and has in fact rejected at least one who is now at Emory. This is a very good sign. We urge continued support for this very productive group of scholars who constitute one of the leading research groups in this field in the United States.

VI. Outcomes Assessment

The department has proposed an ambitious portfolio-based procedure for assessing undergraduate learning outcomes. This proposal is consistent with the department's genuine dedication to providing an excellent undergraduate education in philosophy and its recognition that assessing a student's philosophical ability is no straightforward matter, and requires reading his/her work and engaging him/her in discussion. Nonetheless, the exit portfolio assessment they propose strikes us as potentially more time-consuming than necessary. Moreover, we are concerned that by focusing only on final outcomes, the department may miss fine-grained information that would be useful in self-monitoring and in tuning their curriculum and pedagogy.

We therefore recommend that the department develop a list of skills that courses at each level of the curriculum (100-500) are intended to develop (e.g. analytical writing, reading for argument, search of databases for literature, etc...) and develop more specific measures to apply at each of these levels to small samples of student work (drawn from students from the top, middle and bottom of the grade distribution). This would enable the department to ensure that teaching at each level is addressing their pedagogical goals.

We also note that in the philosophy and law concentration it is reasonable to assume that many students take themselves to be pre-law students (and this may well be the case for students in other concentrations within the major as well). It might be a good idea to monitor how many pre-law students succeed in application to law school, as this is a reasonable intended outcome of undergraduate education in philosophy for many students.

We think that the department has adopted an appropriate range of assessment measures for its graduate program.

VII. Future Hiring and Diversity

Among the specific questions posed to this Committee by the Philosophy Dept. is advice on prioritizing the hiring "wish list." We recommend that the top two priorities be hiring in social and political philosophy and logic. An additional position in Indian philosophy or in 19th & 20th century European philosophy would be advantageous, but is not critical.

The Department must attend in any future hiring decisions to diversity issues. Both racial and gender imbalances demand attention. Remediating the gender imbalance among the faculty will contribute to ameliorating some issues noted in section IV *supra*. We advise that in future hirings considerations of diversity be granted at least equal status as considerations of area of specialization.