

**Department of Philosophy and Classics, University of Regina
Report of Review Team
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Executive Summary

A robust philosophy department plays a central role in any successful research university. We are pleased to report that the Philosophy and Classics Department at the University of Regina contributes constructively to the mission of the University. It reliably delivers well-conceived and high-quality courses to students at the University. The success of the teaching mission of the Department is particularly evident in the first and second year courses they offer. These courses are diverse, thoughtfully conceived, and effectively delivered. Courses at this level are generally well-enrolled and serve the needs and interests of students in many disciplines. Students are impressed by the quality of instruction and the dedication of the faculty to facilitating a welcoming and strongly participatory classroom environment. The Department can capitalize on this positive reception by students and is pursuing steps to further enrich the student experience.

Enrollment in the Philosophy as a Major is quite low and this creates challenges for the Department offering third and fourth year courses that are essential parts of the Major. The Department is aware of these challenges and is receptive to proposals to boost enrollment and attract more students to the Major. There is apprehension on the part of many members of the Department that current low enrollment in senior Philosophy classes may jeopardize the Major. The perceived precarity of the Major adversely affects the morale of the faculty. But in this context, it is a testimony to the dedication of the faculty to the program that they have opted to teach a higher than normal teaching load so as to ensure that students pursuing the Major have sufficient courses available to them. (Members of the Department have a 4.5 unit load rather than the more typical 4.0.)

The Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (PPE) program is strong and the Department's participation in the program (along with its crucial role in founding the program) reflects its commitment to valuable interdisciplinarity and its openness to cooperate creatively with other units. In these and other areas, the overall success of the Department is attributable in good part to the remarkable degree of collegiality and cooperation they display. The fact that some members of the Department have one of the federated colleges (Campion and Luther) as their institutional home could present obstacles to the smooth operation of the Department. However, the Department is united via a laudable cooperative ethos that facilitates shared decision making about departmental matters despite the administrative complexities they face. The strong leadership provided by the current chair complements the Department's commitment to inclusive and cooperative governance and puts the Department in a good position to respond constructively to challenges it faces. However, too many administrative responsibilities fall directly on the Chair. To ensure that administrative responsibilities are fairly shared and effectively discharged, the Department can establish a list of Departmental duties and distribute tasks equitably to members of the Department.

Through some of its innovative teaching initiatives and the research agenda of some faculty, the Department has laudable engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation process with Indigenous peoples. The Department clearly contributes to the advancement of the university's commitments on this front. The research output of the Department is uneven and could be developed. Although some members of the Department have active research programs, the research activities by others are very modest. There appears to be a healthy intellectual environment in the Department expressed in an enthusiasm for philosophical discussion and exchange. There is room for the Department to channel this energy to projects such as a regular Departmental colloquium that may help to enhance the research orientation of the Department. A strong research climate is often propelled by a viable graduate program. Although the Department wishes to retain the possibility of special arrangement MA degrees, the capacity of the Department to offer a viable MA program is extremely limited both because there are insufficient resources to fund students and because the Department is not currently in a position to offer appropriate courses at the graduate level. Pursuit of graduate education should be postponed until conditions are more favourable.

Overall, the Department is a well-functioning, successful unit that has the potential to build upon its existing strengths. Its aspirations and plans are reasonable. They are predicated on a good understanding of the resources and opportunities available to it along with awareness of the obstacles it faces in moving forward with plans. The Department is well-aligned with the University's Strategic Plan and it is well-placed to meet the challenges it currently faces in a constructive and creative fashion.

Background and Overview of the Review

Prior to the site visit, the reviewers studied the Department Self Study Document and other documents and materials about the University of Regina provided by the university administration. During the visit, we requested some additional materials (e.g., CVs for Department members at the federated colleges, and sample course syllabi) and these were provided in a very efficient fashion. We met and had good discussions with members of the Department, support staff, various university administrators, and a small group of students. (We did not meet with representatives from First Nations University of Canada.) We were impressed by how helpful and cooperative everyone was and we benefited from the frank conversations we were able to conduct. The site visit combined with the documents made available provided us with an excellent basis on which to evaluate the Department. We are grateful for the time and effort our hosts devoted to the visit. We took it as a good sign that everyone we encountered seemed dedicated to the success of the Department and sought to work cooperatively to that end. In what follows, we elaborate on the basic points noted in the executive summary by addressing the following broad matters: (1) Department Alignment with Strategic Plan (2) Program Delivery and Student Experience (3) Research Excellence and Potential (4) Faculty Complement and

Administration (5) Challenges and Opportunities and (6) Recommendations and Suggestions.

Department Alignment with Strategic Plan

Even though a relatively small department, Philosophy and Classics makes significant contributions to the University's Strategic Plan. URegina's institutional priorities are summarized below, along with an account of the Department's marked support for them.

1. *"Together, We Learn: By 2035, the University of Regina will be recognized as the prairie university offering one of Canada's most distinctive and transformative learning experiences."* The Department's commitment to quality teaching and engaging programming for students in Philosophy, Classics, and cognate disciplines is clear and impressive. Its contribution to the PPE Program is particularly noteworthy. URegina's PPE program is the only one of its kind in Western Canada and one of only seven such programs in Canada. The promise of this distinctive, growing program depends on the Department's capacity to offer a 400-level capstone course on a regular basis. Another distinctive and transformative learning experience is offered in PHIL 290AT, The Indian Residential School System: Philosophical Issues. In this course, the University of Regina is advancing a rare opportunity for much needed discussion of the value and knowledge systems involved in the IRSS with a view to enhancing constructive discussion around nation to nation relationships.
2. *"Together, We Discover: By 2035, the University of Regina will be recognized as a research-intensive comprehensive university, distinguished by teaching excellence and recognized nationally for engaged scholarship."* Philosophy and Classics is doing remarkable work collaborating meaningfully with other disciplines and communities. Dr. Simard-Smith's research on the Metis Nation (with Dr. Kurtis Boyer) is collaborative and informed, in part, by engagement with the Metis Nation. Furthermore, his upcoming participation in the Metis Nation Institute for Research and Governance, will focus on the development of research projects concerning Metis culture, values and language. Dr. Jerome Melancon's work (supported by a SSHRC Partnership Grant) includes the creation of a research collective that will train Indigenous community researchers in the study of the history of the Indian Residential School system, missing children and unmarked graves, and the ongoing removal of Indigenous children from their families. Dr. Petry's long-standing contribution to the Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development provides yet another impressive example of engaged scholarship. Finally, Dr. Clifton is now a Research Fellow at the University of Graz, working on issues related to climate change. The Department can build

on these successes and work toward enhancing its overall research output and reputation.

3. *“Together, We Build: By 2035, the University of Regina will be recognized as a trusted and responsive partner that works alongside communities to address shared priorities and strengthen social, cultural, ecological, and economic wellbeing.”* Several of the research projects, accomplishments, and appointments outlined above (in priority two) demonstrate the Department’s contribution to strengthening social, cultural, and ecological well-being. The Department makes significant community-based contributions.
4. *“Together, We Put Things Right: By 2035, the University of Regina will be recognized for advancing Truth and Reconciliation as a sustained, institution wide commitment embedded across learning, research, and campus life.”* URegina’s admirable commitment to Truth and Reconciliation is clearly advanced by the work of Dr. Melancon, as well as Dr. Simard-Smith’s work on, and with, the Metis Nation. Philosophy and Classics is making a striking and significant contribution to this institutional priority.
5. *“Together, We Innovate: By 2035, the University of Regina will be recognized as a values-driven and thoughtful digital institution where innovation strengthens learning, research, service, and human connection.”* Philosophy is by nature responsive to change and open to innovation. To date, Philosophy and Classics has an impressive track record in innovative teaching and solid research. However, to make further contributions it would need more faculty.

Program Delivery and Student Experience

A small but steady number of students graduate each year with a Minor in Classics. The program is efficiently run and the main faculty member currently offering classes is enthusiastic about scholarship and teaching. Champion College seems supportive of the program, and rightly so. Though few students Minor in Classics, the class enrollments are quite healthy. We did not speak with students who were doing the Classics Minor, nor did we receive survey data about the student experience in the Minor.

The Philosophy Major is well-delivered and consists of an interesting and entirely appropriate set of course offerings. The course syllabi we reviewed indicate that the courses are well-designed and offer students ample opportunity to acquire knowledge, engage in intellectual reflection, and develop critical reading and reasoning skills. The program requires that students take a number of credit units in each of three areas of Philosophy: History of Philosophy, Problems of Philosophy, and Value Theory. This leaves students with considerable choice. There are no required courses. Students are required to complete at least one course at the 300

or 400-level in each of the three areas of Philosophy. While some Philosophy programs have stricter (or less flexible) requirements, this approach is typical of programs in Canada. One of the virtues of this model is that it allows students to satisfy the Major's requirements while satisfying their own curiosity. Recent course offerings include a healthy array of topics. Course offerings are considered well in advance and thus students should be able to prudently chart their way through the program, provided that classes are not cancelled due to low enrollments.

It is understandable that students would be concerned about the cancellation of low-enrollment classes. This may interfere with the success of the program to an extent. While attention to enrollments is necessary and reasonable, some nuance in applying the low course enrollment cancellation policy seems appropriate given the fact that the faculty in Philosophy have volunteered to teach an extra half class each year precisely in order to maintain the Major. If low enrollment seminars (300 and 400-level classes) are regularly canceled then the Major is put in jeopardy. If the Major is put in jeopardy, faculty have no reason to teach an extra half class every year. So even from the standpoint of maintaining healthy enrollments, it isn't obvious that applying the policy in every case is prudent. Enrollments in upper-level Philosophy classes should be considered in the context of overall workload and aggregated enrollment numbers.

That said, some initiatives could be undertaken to increase enrollments in upper-year classes and the Major. For example, could 300 and 400-level class topics be chosen so as to attract more students from outside the Major? Some strategies for strengthening the Major are outlined in "Recommendations and Suggestions", below. A designated space for students to study and socialize outside of class can go a long way to building a sense of community and increasing the number of Majors. Discussion-based disciplines like Philosophy are particularly in need of such a resource. In addition, Philosophy Departments need to educate students about potential career paths available to Philosophy Majors. Advertising the success of former students and the readily available statistics indicating the success Philosophy Majors have in writing the GRE, LSAT, and so on, can help to reassure students who might be inclined to study Philosophy but worried that it is impractical. (A recent review of the evidence that studying philosophy improves critical thinking skills with broad applicability is available here: PRINZING, M., & VAZQUEZ, M. (2025). Studying Philosophy Does Make People Better Thinkers. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 11(4), 640–658. doi:10.1017/apa.2025.10007.) At present, AI poses threats to many professions previously thought to be safe paths to secure and interesting work, leaving us in a state of change and uncertainty. In this transformative period, Philosophy is well-placed to train students contending with future work alternatives shaped, for good and ill, by AI. The undergraduates with whom we spoke were very positive about the faculty and the classes they had taken. We did not receive survey data about the student experience in the program.

The Philosophy Minor requires 18 credit units in Philosophy and requires at least one class in each of the three areas (History, Problems, and Values). Increased initiatives to grow the Major should, at the same time, increase participation in the Minor, as well as the Minor in Philosophical Anthropology, the Minor in Critical Thinking and Professional Ethics, and the Minor in Philosophy of Science.

Overall, the unit offers quality programs, and the programs clearly meet the “learning needs” of students interested in these disciplines. The Department plays a key role in the growing Philosophy, Politics and Economics Program. It also makes important contributions to related disciplines and fields of study by regularly offering courses that can be used in the fulfillment of programs including: Health Studies, Religious Studies, Human Justice, Indigenous Environmental Science, Catholic Studies, International Studies, Resource and Environmental Studies, Outdoor Education, Kinesiology, Medical Laboratory Science, Medical Radiation Technology, Indigenous Knowledge and Science. This is a considerable list. Beyond this, the Department’s classes are also options in a number of certificate programs, including: Law and Society Certificate, Certificate in Queer, Trans, and Gender Studies, Certificate in German Language and Culture, Certificate in Nonprofit Sector Leadership and Innovation, Certificate in Canadian Studies, Certificate in Ideation, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship, and the Certificate in Indigenous Environmental Management. Clearly, this unit’s offerings are of consequential benefit to many and diverse programs and fields of study at URegina.

Research Excellence and Potential

The faculty of the Department are well-trained and they have diverse but broadly complementary research interests and projects. The scope of research in terms of topics is quite broad with fruitful engagement with topics such as contemporary ethics, political philosophy, Indigenous philosophy, continental traditions, Hellenistic history, and logic. The general climate of supportive collegiality and broad intellectual engagement in the Department is impressive and suggests that there are opportunities for fruitful research exchange and collaboration within the Department. Similarly, some members of the Department have secured significant research grants (e.g., Melancon, Petry) and the recent publication record of some faculty is excellent (e.g., Melancon, Ramsey). These facets of the Department are encouraging and suggest that the Department has the potential to make noteworthy contributions to scholarship that gain broad recognition. However, the overall calibre of scholarly contributions by the Department is currently modest. Although most of the Department have active research agendas, total scholarly output gauged by refereed publications is not notably high and, for the most part, publications are not placed in highly ranked journals and presses. (High rates of publication and placement in prominent outlets are not necessary conditions of scholarly excellence. However, these factors strongly influence the reputation of a Department and they contribute to the impact of research in many fields.) The research record of the Department is not unsatisfactory. But improvements on this front are needed in order

for the Department to become a research intensive unit with a national reputation for scholarly excellence.

It may be that to some degree, the strong (and otherwise laudable) commitment of the Department to teaching excellence has diminished the focus on research by some members of the Department. Members of the Department expressed concerns that low enrollments in upper year courses might, in the eyes of the administration, put the Philosophy degree programs in jeopardy. This concern has negatively impacted morale in the Department and energy that might have been devoted to enhancing the research climate has been directed to ensuring the viability of the Philosophy degree programs. This is reflected, for instance, in the fact that faculty in the Department voluntarily teach an extra half class each year as compared to other faculty in Arts. The commitment to teaching 'extra to load' reduces time, opportunity, and appetite for more ambitious research activities.

The absence of a viable graduate program in Philosophy or Classics is also an impediment to more research activity. The opportunity to mentor graduate students in one's area of research expertise and to teach courses that engage with more sophisticated material pertinent to one's research project can help in the development and pursuit of new research projects. Similarly, high quality graduate students can serve as valuable research assistants. We recognize that the University is not currently in the position to fund even a modest graduate program. However, in the medium term it would be good for the University to explore devoting resources to graduate education of the sort that will complement faculty research. Similarly, the faculty and the Department should investigate whether there are opportunities for involvement of the members of the Department in interdisciplinary graduate programs at the University.

Faculty Complement and Administration

The recent retirements of two Philosophers leave the unit with nine members (seven Philosophers and two Classicists). Two members are Assistant Professors, four are Associate, and three are Professors. The review team noted, with some concern, the gender imbalance. Nonetheless, class enrollment data shows typical to healthy "female" participation rates in Philosophy programming and in the Major. Philosophy is a discipline that continues to attract predominantly male students. The Classics programming has strong female student participation rates. With only two full-time faculty, one of whom is serving in an administrative role, it is difficult to offer courses necessary for students to obtain a Minor in Classics when faculty are on leave. Given the healthy program, marked student interest, and dedicated faculty, the program should be resourced to ensure that the needed course offerings for the Minor are made available during leaves, perhaps by sessionals.

This unit is well-run and highly cooperative. Clear lines of communication are evident. Sessional lecturers are welcome to participate in Department meetings and

in the broader life of the Department if they so choose. While the unit is successfully managed, too much of the work is done by the Department Head. This structure risks failure to complete important tasks, over-working the Chair, and makes the position of Chair unappealing to possible future candidates. As outlined in the “Recommendations and Suggestions” section, we advise the creation of administrative departmental roles and a fair division of labour. For example, the Department currently has a Graduate Chair for the infrequently active Special Case MA Program, but no Undergraduate Chair. Given the comparative size of the undergraduate program and its significance to the Department’s identity and programming, a faculty member responsible for its oversight is appropriate. Historically, the Department has offered community outreach initiatives of various sorts that were disrupted by the pandemic. A Community Outreach Coordinator could resume this work. The Department Head will be better placed to advocate for the unit if they are not busy taking care of, for example, public outreach programs or high school recruitment activities. Furthermore, it is typically expected that as faculty members move up the ranks from assistant to full professor, they serve in administrative tasks more fully. A more coordinated approach to departmental administration could facilitate a faculty member’s path to advancement.

Challenges and Opportunities

It can be difficult for smaller units with complex administrative structures to seize opportunities. Yet, in recent years, the Department has successfully contributed to the promotion of institutional priorities around Indigenization and Truth and Reconciliation. Recent programmatic initiatives are innovative and have been deftly handled. Further such programming may be possible if resources are available. The Department has also shown an interest in working with other units to offer classes suited to their needs. Consideration should also be given to future opportunities of this kind. The Centre for Continuing Education seems to play a sizable role in course delivery and development at the University of Regina. Further clarity around how new initiatives are advanced by CCE while respecting disciplinary authority would be beneficial to the Department.

Successful delivery of courses needed by the Department depends on the regular employment of a small number of sessional instructors. The remuneration for this work is relatively poor and there is little job security. This places the instructors in an extremely precarious situation and they are ripe for exploitation. Like many Canadian universities, University of Regina does not adequately compensate or support long-serving sessional instructors. If the University wishes to display fidelity to its “Together We Build” commitment in the Strategic Plan to strengthen the social and economic wellbeing of the community, it should improve policies regarding the employment of sessional instructors.

The most significant challenge the Department faces is the possible loss of its program. As previously indicated, faculty have raised concerns that policies intended

to reduce low-enrolment senior-level courses may place the program at risk. If senior seminar classes cannot be consistently offered without threat of cancellation the program is no longer tenable. This is demoralizing for faculty who are already doing extra-to-load work to maintain their program. Furthermore, the University's stated interest in becoming known as a research-intensive comprehensive university won't be advanced by the loss of a degree-based Philosophy Department. How might the Department respond to this challenge? Within this report, we provide some suggestions for attracting students to the Major. Beyond that, it would be helpful if the Department had a clearer sense from the administration of how they could secure their program's position.

Another challenge faced by the Department is insufficient resources to operate an MA program. While there seems to be faculty willingness, even enthusiasm, the Department lacks resources in the form of funding for MA students and so the program is not competitive. With guaranteed funding, MA students can be given teaching assistantships, and this can in turn allow for larger sections of some introductory classes as graduate students take on some of the grading.

The Department's strong sense of community is evident; however, it has not been fully leveraged to advance its research activities. As noted above, some of the faculty's research profiles are very active but a stronger research climate can be developed. A regular faculty colloquium could help to energize the research culture and outputs of the Department. Mentorship for new faculty is important.

Recommendations and Suggestions

The following recommendations are directed primarily at the Department but successful pursuit of many of them depend on the support of the Faculty and University through the provision of resources (e.g., modest funding, physical space) and administrative assistance (e.g., in coordinating outreach and recruitment initiatives).

1. ***Establish a Department colloquium.*** Encourage faculty and sessional lecturers to present works in progress or completed papers on a regular basis (once or twice a month during the regular session). Senior undergraduates can be invited to attend. This gives the presenter an opportunity for useful feedback, develops understanding of each other's strengths and areas of expertise, and helps to invigorate a research culture. Members of cognate departments can also be invited, but sharing research within the department is important and interesting. The University should make available some funding to facilitate occasional speakers from other universities. The Department should explore the possibility of pairing with other units (e.g., Politics and International Studies, Psychology, or Economics) to host visiting speakers.

2. **Apply for Research Funding.** Although some members of the Department have secured impressive external grants, there is room for broader pursuit of funding opportunities by the members of the Department. Competition for large SSRHC grants is, of course, fierce but the research environment of the Department can be enhanced via successful pursuit of smaller grants (e.g., SSHRC Connection Grants) that can facilitate smaller valuable workshops and collaborations. Successful pursuit of such grants does depend on the willingness of the University to assist in the provision of matching contributions (both cash funding and in-kind funding).
3. **Revive the Philosophy Cafe and Film Discussion Series.** It is understandable that the Covid-19 pandemic derailed the Philosophy Café and Film Discussion Series. If those initiatives cannot be revived, a replacement for them is encouraged as a way of establishing the value of Philosophy and Classics to the broader community.
4. **Establish an official list of Departmental administrative duties.** The list should include: undergraduate advisor, Philosophy student union liaison, colloquium organizer, outreach/recruitment coordinator, and curriculum committee. Faculty should have a shared sense of the Department's priorities, the work involved in different roles, and the time commitments they involve. These duties should be fairly distributed among the members of the Department.
5. **Organize advising sessions for undergraduates.** We suggest that the Undergraduate Chair organize advising sessions for declared Majors and for those taking several Philosophy classes. In our meeting with faculty, concerns were raised about the possibility that Philosophy would be disadvantaged by the University's move to a centralized advising system. Indeed, at least one member of this review team has had experience of this problem on their own campus. To protect itself, the Department could institute Spring advising sessions for undergrads. These can simultaneously be a way of advertising interesting classes to non-Philosophy majors. The Undergraduate Chair could arrange for Arts Students Advising to direct interested students to them. Also, students appreciate making contact with faculty outside of the classroom and can come to identify more strongly as Philosophy Majors as a result.
6. **Establish a dedicated meeting space for philosophy students.** Students would be more likely to declare as Philosophy Majors if they had space within which they could study, carry on conversations started in classes, conduct the business of their student union, and just hang out. Because the doing of Philosophy requires verbal interaction, a dedicated space where students (and faculty) can interact is extremely important for growth of the Major. The space available beside the Department Head's office could be put to such an

end. A Critical Thinking Lab, for example, or an Essay Writing Help Centre, staffed by senior undergraduates could be established.

7. **Refresh and update the web page.** The website is the face of the Department. As currently configured, it doesn't give a clear sense of what URegina's Philosophy and Classics Department is actually like. Outdated courses should be removed, as should pictures of faculty no longer in the department. Photos of faculty currently in the department should be added.
8. **Conduct a curriculum review.** The Department should undergo a review of courses with a view to eliminating unduly narrowly focused courses at the upper level and determining whether new courses should be added.
9. **Enhance student recruitment efforts.** The Department can explore various options to promote the Philosophy courses and degree programs. For example, the Department can attract high school students to Philosophy and Classics by doing guest lectures at URegina Days in high schools. The Department can create promotional materials (e.g., brochures or a Departmental Handbook) that explain the value of philosophy education as preparation for professional programs like Law and tout the value of the PPE program. Such efforts would be sensibly supported by staff with relevant expertise in creating excellent materials.
10. **Explore the possibility of teaching ethics courses for Criminology and Kinesiology.** The Self-Study document expressed concerns about a worrisome "competition" between departments over classes. There seems to be evidence that other Departments may assume a capacity to teach what are effectively Philosophy classes. For example, Philosophers specializing in Ethics have training in ethical theory and its application in various contexts. Philosophy has expertise that other departments can make use of in their programming, in the same way that they might, for example, use classes from the Math and Statistics Department. We note that Criminology is now teaching a course called "Professional Ethics" with a course description that is unfortunately similar to the Philosophy Department's "Professional Ethics" course. Efforts along these lines will require the assistance of the administration to ensure coordination and cooperation across units.