



Faculty of Arts

Office of the Dean  
St. John's, NL, Canada A1C 3S1  
Tel: 709 737 8254 Fax: 709 737 2135  
deanarts@mun.ca www.mun.ca

June 14, 2007

TO: The Planning and Budget Committee  
FROM: Reeta C. Tremblay, Dean, Faculty of Arts  
SUBJECT: Department of Philosophy, Action Plan

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I am forwarding you the Philosophy department's action plan. I fully concur with the Academic Program Review which speaks of the excellent and exceptional esprit de corps widely prevalent in the department and the conscious cultivation by the members of the department of a culture of collegiality, inclusiveness, cohesiveness and nurturing of their students. After receiving the Academic Program Review report in November 2006, the department began a series of discussions. This action plan is a result of those departmental deliberations and a consultation with me. I am pleased to report that the department has begun to implement several of the APR recommendations, such as: a review of the undergraduate curriculum (Recommendations 3, 4, 5); an efficient usage of its faculty resources with regard to the academic delivery of its undergraduate program (Recommendation 6); and a review of the Masters program, the thesis requirement for its Masters students and a timely completion of the degree (Recommendation 9).

I agree with the department and the Academic Program Review that the permanent faculty complement of the department should not fall below eight. The Review recommends two additional faculty. To begin with, any further increases in the faculty complement will depend upon an increased enrollment of its undergraduate and graduate students. During the academic year 2006-07, the Philosophy department's undergraduate enrollments have gone down by 10.6%, from 1,739 to 1,564. The department is working hard to stabilize its enrollments by cancelling non-viable sections, offering more service courses on campus and via distance education. Furthermore, any discussion of a further increase in the faculty complement for the Philosophy department by two (Recommendation 2) must lie in the future, depending upon the financial health of the Faculty of Arts.

I am encouraged to see the department's responses to Recommendations 10 and 11. The department is cognizant of the fact that it must develop a stronger research profile and has set the strengthening of its research profile as a priority. Although the APR points out that "unfunded research is the norm in

philosophy and much of the humanities", the department acknowledges the spin-off benefits of external grants in terms of disseminating the faculty's research and supporting graduate training. I would strongly encourage the department to follow Recommendation 11 of the Academic Program Review which states, "members of the department should be encouraged to continue to apply for external grants such as SSHRCs" which carries neither the expectation that all these applications would result in actual grants; and nor in the absence of such grants, the judgment that members of the departments would not be productive researchers.



Reeta C. Tremblay  
Dean, Faculty of Arts

c: Dr. Peter Trnka, Interim Head, Department of Philosophy



# Memorial

University of Newfoundland

Dean of Arts

JUN 11 2007

*[Handwritten signature]*

Department of Philosophy

8 June 2007

Dear Reeta Tremblay,

**RE: ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

I am writing you to outline the response of the Department of Philosophy to the APR report of November 15 2006. This response develops the points made in my earlier letter of 17 January 2007 and the Action Plan of February 26 2007.

**Recommendation 1: The permanent faculty complement of the Department of Philosophy should not fall below eight (8), which the Panel views as a critical mass for its normal functioning.**

**Answer:** We agree wholeheartedly with this recommendation and believe the Review Panel described our full departmental activities well in reaching this recommendation. The panel noted our 'exceptional esprit de corps' and our 'excellence on a shoestring' (3). We run an active, well-regarded, and successful undergraduate and M.A. graduate program, as well as a Diploma in Applied Ethics and a substantial portion of the M. Phil. in Humanities; we also conduct much service-oriented teaching by way of Research Writing and applied ethics courses. We are looking forward to participating in the proposed new Interdisciplinary Ph.D. and have ambitions for a Philosophy Ph.D. We are also looking to expand our service teaching in the areas of Critical Thinking and Philosophy of Science. The panel is correct in stating that eight permanent faculty is a minimum below which we would not be able to sustain our current level of activities and programs. Any expansion of our activities and programs would be impossible below this minimum complement. We were very pleased to hire an excellent candidate in phenomenology this year, Dr. Sean McGrath and are pleased to have a bridging contract approved for a position in ancient philosophy for next year.

**Responsibility:** P. Trnka

**Deadline:** Open

**Recommendation 2: The Department has a strong case for two additional permanent positions. In the Panel's view these two new positions will allow them to consolidate what they have at present time and lay firm foundations for the future development.**

**Answer:** We agree wholeheartedly with this recommendation. As per our answer to #1, the Panel noted both our excellence and the minimal resources with which we have more than made do. If the strong condition of our undergraduate and graduate programs, service teaching, public intellectual discussion, and public and community outreach is not to rely only on our continued esprit de corps but is to have some more secure foundation

then providing two additional faculty members is essential. Any future developments are obviously closely linked to the provision of such positions. The soundness of our existing programs is also of course a function of the number of permanent positions in the department. Finally, our capacity to develop our research and publication is closely linked to an improvement in our workloads, which are high given the current balance of activities and permanent positions. We have had some initial discussion of the areas for which new positions should be targeted, namely broad analytic philosophy, philosophy of science, and aesthetics. We will be conducting thorough appraisals of these areas through collective discussion and assessment of our existing research and teaching strengths.

**Responsibility:** P. Trnka

**Deadline:** Open

**Recommendation 3: Undertake without delay a thorough review of the undergraduate curriculum, which will serve to articulate the strengths of the Department's undergraduate program. Desired outcomes include having a program that attracts and retains more undergraduate students to Philosophy, finding ways to enable more permanent faculty resources to be moved back into the lower level courses, and streamlining the curriculum.**

**Answer:** We fully agree that such a review is overdue and that now is the time to do it given the number of new hires in our department in recent years. The undergraduate curriculum has not been substantially revised in years and needs refreshing and reorienting. A number of piecemeal changes have been adopted over the last decade or so but little or no attention has been given to how the program functions as a whole.

**Responsibility:** N. Oman, A. Sullivan, S. Rajiva, and P. Trnka

**Deadline:** 1 October 2007

**Recommendation 4: Eliminate from the calendar those courses which are deemed 'inactive' and which have neither been taught for several years, nor are likely to be offered in the near future.**

**Answer:** We agree that the calendar should reflect more accurately the practices of the Department and will proceed to review the inactive courses and decide upon which ones to delete.

**Responsibility:** P. Trnka

**Deadline:** 1 October 2007

**Recommendation 5: Develop and introduce a first-year course in Critical Thinking.**

**Answer:** We agree wholeheartedly and a proposal is in process.

**Responsibility:** A. Sullivan

**Deadline:** 15 September 2007

**Recommendation 6: Review the current practice of offering multiple small sections of two first year introductory courses and one second year introductory course.**

**Answer:** We fully agree. The anachronistic status of the second year introductory course, together with its falling enrolments in the last couple of years, have led to fewer sections being offered and point to elimination of the course.

**Responsibility:** N. Oman

**Deadline:** 1 October 2007

**Recommendation 7: Consider making both PHIL2701 and PHIL2702 required courses for Philosophy majors, joint honours, and honours students.**

**Answer:** While we see the sense in this proposal we are not convinced that the consequences are worth it in terms of further restriction of student choices. Such an option will be considered in the context of our general assessment of our undergraduate curriculum.

**Responsibility:** S. Rajiva

**Deadline:** 1 October 2007

**Recommendation 8: The administration at MUN should provide much improved funding to its Faculty of Graduate Studies in order for Departments to remain competitive for the best graduate students.**

**Answer:** We agree wholeheartedly. We note and approve of the Panel's skepticism with regard to faculty research grants forming a stable base of graduate student funding, especially as 'research in philosophy is far less conducive to co-operative projects than in other disciplines, and joint papers are the exception rather than the rule' (10). We will explore opportunities within our M.A. structure and especially with the School of Graduate Studies in following through on this recommendation.

**Responsibility:** A. Stafford, C. Jablonski, A. Meisen

**Deadline:** Open

**Recommendation 9: The Department should undertake a review of the MA program and especially the thesis requirement, with a view to making completion of the program in one year more nearly the norm. The distribution of required courses should be reconsidered and perhaps adjusted, and the requirement of a formal thesis should either be replaced by that of a senior research paper, or be better defined and be accompanied by a reduction in the number of courses required. Desired outcomes include a more streamlined course of study, a clarification of the requirements for a satisfactory thesis or senior research project, and, above all, an improved completion rate.**

**Answer:** We agree that a review of our M.A. makes sense especially as concerns the thesis. We changed from a two-year to a one-year M.A. a few years ago but our expectations for the thesis and our completion times did not change accordingly. We are

now reviewing our current structure and investigating the option of running both one year and two year M.A.s, with only the latter having a thesis.

**Responsibility:** A. Stafford

**Deadline:** 1 October 2007

**Recommendation 10:** In order to position itself for the possible development of a Ph.D. program, the Department should be encouraged first to develop a stronger research profile in the areas of its expertise. It also needs to ensure that it is able to provide a balanced program, and, in order to consolidate its existing strength in connecting the history of philosophy with systematic issues in epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics, is encouraged to consider the need for bolstering its faculty resources in broadly analytic philosophy.

**Answer:** We agree that strengthening our research profile is a priority and we are investigating various possibilities for doing so, some of which are related to aforementioned recommendations. We will institute in August 2007 a Philosophy Publishing Collective which will meet monthly to circulate information concerning publishing venues, provide editorial assistance to works in progress, and orchestrate collaborative writing projects (Chair P. Trnka). We have also paid close attention to publishing records in recent hirings and are thereby strengthening our collective publishing profile. In developing our future research strengths we will take into account the Panel's statement of our capacities and needs and engage in a collective enterprise of assessment, an enterprise that will include both debate concerning what a balanced program is and how better to achieve that balance, whether it be by more analytic philosophy or other means. Work on all of the above will include in a significant manner the growing set of active retired or semi-retired Philosophy faculty (Drs. Peter Harris, Evan Simpson, and David Thompson).

**Responsibility:** All

**Deadline:** Open

**Recommendation 11:** Members of the Department should be encouraged to continue to apply for external grants such as SSHRCs; but with no expectation that they will not be able to be productive researchers in the absence of such grants.

**Answer:** We agree with this balanced recommendation and note the Panel's view that 'unfunded research is the norm in philosophy and much of the humanities, and there are many prolific researchers who do not receive funding' (13). While grant seeking for its own sake may take valuable time away from research and teaching, we will encourage grant applications when and for whom they make sense. We acknowledge the benefits of an active grant-seeking culture in terms of spin-offs for publications and graduate student training and will encourage such activities accordingly.

**Responsibility:** All

**Deadline:** Open

**Recommendation 12: A position in Ancient Philosophy must be guaranteed on Dr. John Scott's retirement in 2008.**

**Answer:** We agree wholeheartedly for the reasons given in #1 and for the basic and foundational fact that western philosophy was born in Ancient Greece and that much, if not all, that is recognizable in philosophical argument, method, content, scholarship, and research takes its inspiration from this origin. Our discipline would be gutted and senseless without a position in Ancient Philosophy, whether or not A.N. Whitehead was right in saying that all subsequent philosophy is a footnote to Plato. We are thus pleased that a bridging appointment in Ancient Philosophy has been approved for next year.

**Responsibility:** P. Trnka

**Deadline:** May 2008

**Recommendation 13: It is imperative that any free(d) space in the University buildings and made available to the Faculty of Arts be distributed equitably among all the Departments so that they can provide adequate space for graduate students to pursue their studies and perform their roles as teaching assistants.**

**Answer:** We fully agree and have made graduate student space a priority in our Department.

**Responsibility:** A. Stafford and P. Trnka

**Deadline:** Open

**Recommendation 14: An appropriate action should be taken toward rectifying the anomaly in the Current Strategic Plan by acknowledging the importance of the role of the Humanities and Social Science under their own title as the 5<sup>th</sup> Thematic Research Area.**

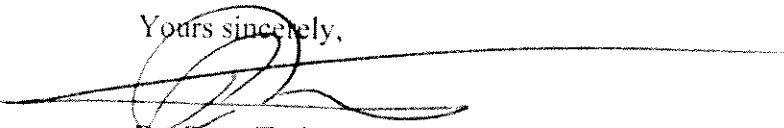
**Answer:** We wholeheartedly agree.

**Responsibility:** All, including R. Tremblay and C. Loomis

**Deadline:** Open

I trust this constitutes an adequate response to the APR and we look forward to engaging in the planned work in the coming months, much of which has already been initiated and is well on the way to completion. We will be meeting as a Department on a number of occasions this Fall to decide upon important issues so that much of our work may be completed by the end of this calendar year.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Peter Trnka

Acting Head of Department of Philosophy