Philosophy Review Response

Philosophy Program Review/Strategic Plan:

Paul Johnson from the Philosophy Department was present for this part of the meeting and addressed a series of questions as well as offered some perspectives on the preparation and content of the review. Clarifications and information were requested on grad school applicants from the department, the number of department majors, and the nature of the data on the program generated by the OIE. Several questions revolved around the near term future of the philosophy curriculum, and Dr. Johnson noted that much of that discussion, which had been on hold pending passage of the new Core Curriculum, could now proceed. Further discussion ensued regarding the staffing during and after the phased retirement of Don Abel and the recruitment of female faculty. The committee and Dr. Johnson continued to exchange ideas and perspectives on the discipline’s curriculum, major requirements, a medical ethics course, the nature of Philosophy at SNC vis-a-vis that at other peer and aspirant institutions, and the tensions involved in reconciling the discipline’s strong commitment to teaching and the institutional intent of increasing scholarly output among all SNC faculty. Dr. Johnson concluded his remarks by noting that the review process was positively experienced by the discipline faculty. (CEPC Minutes, 12/1/11)

CEPC Response/Discussion regarding Philosophy Program Review (12/8/11)

Type of Program Review: Year One Report – Statement of Program Mission, Vision, Goals, and Year One Action Steps

Comments on Stated Mission:

The CEPC compliments Philosophy for a well-crafted mission statement that reflects both its central role in academics at St. Norbert College and its particular mission as a discipline. Generalized learning and engagement goals for students and the discipline as a whole are clearly stated.

Comments on Strategic Planning and Vision:

The CEPC notes that in several respects the discipline is in a transitional phase, making this section of the report more difficult to finalize, but also noted that the review process is designed to assist disciplines in this sort of situation. CEPC recommends that the vision statement be strengthened to state more clearly where the department would like to be in areas of importance (academic quality, faculty productivity, and student retention for example) in five years. Articulation of any planned or intended significant differences from their current status would be especially helpful in terms of strategic planning and action steps. The Committee notes that the discipline has worked with OIE but
that such collaboration could and should be improved to assist in moving toward the 5-year vision. Although a firm strategic plan is suggested in the Year One Statement, the discipline should prepare or share a strategic plan into which the many planned action steps may be incorporated. Furthermore, with the recent adoption of a new Core Curriculum, Philosophy should include attention to its key role in core curricular studies at St. Norbert and include discussions of shaping that role in strategic plans and in vision statements (as the discipline itself noted in Section B, Action Steps). The CEPC also suggests that the Associate Dean for HMA engage and help guide these discussions.

Comments on Goals and Action Steps:

The Year One Statement lists multiple Goals and Action Steps under the categories Restructuring our Assessment Regime, Discipline Contributions to General Education, Discipline Program Advisor, and Review of Program Curriculum. The CEPC applauds the detail presented in the action steps and the rationales supporting them. In addition to these, the Committee suggested other goals and action steps that would be appropriate for the discipline to adopt given its Statement and the discussion held on December 1 regarding the program. These include:

- Work with OIE to improve assessment data collection and analysis for these purposes. The OIE review of your program notes an absence of direct and indirect measures of student learning and of indirect measures of program effectiveness. It also notes that the last assessment report from Philosophy was submitted to OIE in 2007 and no requests for data analysis from OIE since 2009. These deficiencies must be addressed in collaboration with OIE. The OIE report also states that only some discipline faculty are involved in the assessment process; efforts need to be made to involve all faculty members in this important work. A reconsideration of your current assessment plan would be wise, given the transitions facing the department and the need for extensive, current data regarding student learning and program assessment.
- The Committee is quite concerned over what appears to be a significant lack of a purposeful, intentional mentoring process for majors and minors regarding opportunities for graduate school and employment. Given the strong scholarly activity of the discipline faculty, the CEPC recommends implementing a process designed to encourage more of its majors to apply to graduate school and to do so successfully at appropriate institutions. The track record of such applications is inconsistent, and the CEPC believes that a systematic approach to such an effort would yield encouraging results.
- Engage in stronger connections with Career Services to facilitate the discipline’s efforts to provide information on careers and employment for philosophy majors and minors. The Committee expresses its concern that the department needs to be more proactive in advising and mentoring its majors in possible career options. The Statement’s suggestion to create a position of Discipline Program Advisor complements such efforts, but the discipline needs to ensure that all discipline faculty are involved in enhancing the mentoring climate for its students and that specific steps are developed and implemented to do so.
• Engage in a detailed assessment of trends in terms of majors and minors to help plan for the future, designate appropriate faculty work load, and especially assist in the stated efforts to review and revise the philosophy curriculum significantly.
• When discussing curriculum review and assessment for the discipline, Philosophy should purposefully and explicitly connect such review to its stated mission.

Comments on Program Curriculum and Assessment:
The CEPC respects the extensive work Philosophy plans for its curriculum review and acknowledges its declaration that the assessment processes (for both students and the program) need to be implemented. Other statements in this response indicate ways in which assessment could be made to run more smoothly.

Next Steps:

Review and Evaluation: Preparation of a Year Two Report following multiple occasions where discipline faculty can meet and discuss their progress in the context of the Year One Statement as well as the various steps and strategies included therein, and to develop collaborative and effective means to address them. Special attention needs to be paid to the assessment process and its implementation.

Reporting Requirement: The discipline will need to submit a program review document (2-4 pages) that includes a discussion and evaluation of the efforts made to achieve the goals outlined in the Year One Statement. The appraisal should review the evolution of the goals as the implementation unfolds. Additionally, the discipline should provide a brief description and review of the updated assessment plan.