

History of the Philosophy Department

The Philosophy Department is part of the traditional core curriculum in Arts and raises the intellectual standards of the Arts programme by teaching reasoning skills, ethics and hermeneutical skills. We teach everything from the Great Books of classic philosophy to the most neglected historical works, and work widely to critically understand the best and worst in contemporary thought. We have four full time tenured professors, one professor (Dr. Peter Koritansky) shared with History and Religious Studies, and some additional Sessional Instructors teaching a repertoire of thirty-five different courses, plus a variety of directed studies related to each professor's research interests.

At the present moment, the Philosophy program is in a state of flux, as we experiment with innovative approaches to teaching and integration of research into the courses, and try out new ways of increasing the majors and minors. There are approximately 10-20 majors and 10-20 minors enrolled normally at any one time, and 5-10 philosophy majors graduate each year. Class sizes range from 3-20 students for advanced philosophy courses to 20-80 for introductory philosophy classes and philosophy electives. There is a Philosophy Society with an elected President run by the students. The full time faculty was renewed entirely in the period from 1992-2002; and we are now in a position to see great growth in teaching, rotation of courses, jobs for students, research grants, service to the University, and essential roles in other programmes such as Environmental Studies and Women's Studies. We are located on the fourth floor of the historic Main Building, overlooking the center of the University.

The Philosophy Department has its roots in the St. Dunstan's University Philosophy Department, led by the Reverend Thomas MacLellan. In 1966-67, just prior to the creation of UPEI, the St. Dunstan's philosophy department consisted of John Eldon Green, Patrick MacInnis and Rev. Thomas MacLellan. These 3 professors taught a total of 9 courses (Logic; Philosophy of Nature; Ethics and Rational Psychology; Metaphysics; Ancient Philosophy; Medieval Philosophy; Modern Philosophy; Contemporary Philosophy; and Christian Social Justice).

The second phase in the evolution of the philosophy programme lasted from 1969 to about 1990, and involved four tenured, full time professors who taught together for over twenty years (Verner Smitheram; Phillip Koch; Ken Butler; and Charles Holmes). In 1969, there were six full time philosophy professors (the above 4, plus T. MacLellan and P. Gosselin) teaching 15 full year courses (Introduction to Philosophy; Logic; Comparative Ethical Theories; Ethics; Ancient and Medieval Philosophy; Modern Philosophy; Social and Political Philosophy; Philosophy of Science; Philosophy of Education; Existentialism; Pragmatism and Contemporary British and American Philosophy; Tutorial; Research Tutorial; Epistemology and Metaphysics; and Philosophy of Religion). By 1988, Smitheram-Butler-Koch-Holmes had expanded to 24 semester length courses by adding new courses (Practical Logic; Ethics and Decision-Making; Origins of Western Philosophy; Personal Philosophy; Philosophical Games; Philosophy of Law; Action and Conflict; Philosophy and

Literature; Phenomenology; Philosophy of Values Education; Ideas of Truth; and Special Studies) and dropping Comparative Ethical Theories and the Tutorial courses. As this group of four philosophers retired from 1994 to 1998, there was a new surge of development in the Philosophy program as UPEI itself expanded.

Starting in 1993, there was a nine year transition period, and a new core group of 4 full time philosophers constituted the third major phase of development of the Philosophy Department: Tony Couture in 1993, Neb Kujundzic in 1997; Malcolm Murray in 1998, and Pamela Courtenay-Hall in 2002. These 4 professors (and some sessional instructors) expanded the programme significantly and now teach more than 35 different courses. They added 22 new courses (Introduction to Ethics and Social Philosophy; Technology, Values, and Science; Contemporary Moral Issues; Environmental Philosophy; Philosophy of Humour; Introduction to Feminist Ethics; Plato and Aristotle; History of Ethical Theory to 1900; Biomedical Ethics; Topics in Feminist Philosophy; Philosophies of Communication; Philosophy of Mind; Philosophy of Language; Philosophy of Biology; Community-based Ethical Inquiry; Radical Philosophy; On Liberty and Liberalism; 20th Century Ethical Theory; Theories of Justice; Critical Theory; Animal Ethics; and Directed Studies) and dropped 9 old courses (Ethics and Decision-Making; Medieval Philosophy; Personal Philosophy; Philosophical Games; Action and Conflict; Phenomenology; Philosophy of Education; Ideas of Truth; and Special Studies).

The results of these major changes are still being assessed, but the improvements have clearly paid off. Our total enrollment of 708 students in 2007-8 set a new record for the department. Our previous peak enrollment is 700 students in 2000-1. According to our records, the Philosophy programme was at its lowest total enrollments in 1979-80 (245 students) and 1982-3 (265 students). For much of phase 2 (Smitheram-Butler-Koch-Holmes era), the total yearly enrollments were in the range of 300-400 (they peaked in 1974-5 at 464 students). Currently, our total yearly enrollments are in the range of 600-700 students. Thus, we have almost doubled total enrollment and expanded the old programme of 24 courses to 35 courses, updated the curriculum, and achieved new levels of research. We have also made major new innovations by great expansion of our Ethics courses and assumed a leadership role in ethical service to the University; developed major new streams of interdisciplinary or applied philosophy courses in environmental studies, technology and moral issues; developed an important service course in reasoning skills; maintained and improved upon our “core” courses in the history of ideas; and generally achieved improved levels of service to the community, the University, the discipline of Philosophy, and the Faculty Association. We have every reason to think that interest in philosophy at UPEI will continue to grow.