

## **Final Assessment Report (FAR) and Implementation Plan**

Periodic Program Review (PPR)

### **Graduate Program in Philosophy (MA)**

Last Updated: November 20, 2019

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the graduate program in **Philosophy (MA)**. This report identifies the peer review identified strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report also includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the final assessment report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

#### **Executive Summary**

The Philosophy MA program is a full-time only, traditional delivery program leading to the degree of Master of Arts, one of five such MA programs offered within the Greater Toronto Area. The degree is typically completed in five semesters (two academic years), and requires completion of two required courses, either a thesis or major-research paper (MRP) and a number of elective courses (seven for MPR students, five for thesis students).

The program aims to offer instruction in the core areas of philosophy and the history of philosophy, and also to allow students to study a particular topic in depth in their thesis or MRP project. Other aims of the program include developing skills of logical analysis and argumentation, textual interpretation and oral and written communication. These aims align with the broader aims articulated in the strategic plans of the

Faculty of Arts and Ryerson University, and meet Ontario's Graduate Degree Level Expectations for Masters programs.

The program is housed in the larger scholarly environment of the Department of Philosophy and Ryerson's Faculty of Arts. The department consists of eighteen full-time faculty, with a wide range of expertise and research interests. The department also brings graduate students into contact with the wider community of scholars beyond Ryerson. Visiting speakers typically participate in graduate seminars, engaging students directly in discussion of their work. MA students are also involved in the teaching life of the department, working as teaching assistants for SSH015: Critical Thinking, a required course for many undergraduate programs in the Faculty of Arts.

The program's annual intake target is thirteen students. Students are funded mainly through a combination of Ryerson scholarship funding, TA income and income from external scholarship awards (SSHRC Bombardier awards and Ontario Graduate Scholarship awards). Seventy students have graduated from the program since it came into existence in the fall of 2010. 72% of graduates complete the program in the expected five semesters, and average time to completion is six semesters. Program retention is high, with about 90% of enrolled students completing the program. Roughly half of our students aim to pursue a career in academia and plan to enroll in a PhD program after completing their degree. About a third of graduates end up taking that path; other career paths include education and law.

Student success in the program is demonstrated by a high rate of completion and an average GPA upon graduation of 3.84 (A minus). Our students also frequently present their research at peer-reviewed conferences in Canada and abroad. Our program has produced three winners of the Faculty of Arts Gold Medal and has had graduates go on to PhD studies at institutions including Oxford, the University of Toronto, McGill, and the University of British Columbia. In general, student satisfaction with the program, as attested in survey responses, is high.

Despite its many strengths, and its successes thus far, the program faces a number of challenges for the near future. One is attracting a greater number of applications as well as applicants with a greater range of philosophical interests. Another is responding to the recent erosion of some traditional sources and levels of student funding.

### **Periodic Program Review and Peer Review Team**

The graduate program in **Philosophy**, Faculty of Arts, submitted a Self-Study Report to the Yeates School of Graduate Studies that outlined program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of the program, program data including data from student surveys and the standard data packages. Course outlines and CVs for full-time faculty members were also appended.

Two external and one internal arm's-length reviewers were selected from a set of proposed candidates. The Peer Review Team (PRT) for the Periodic Program Review (PPR) of the graduate program in Philosophy (MA) consisted of Dr. Andrew Botterell (Philosophy, Western), Dr. Lorraine Markotic (Philosophy, Calgary), and Dr. Chris MacDonald (TRSM, Ryerson).

The appraisal committee spent two days at Ryerson. The visit included interviews with the University and Faculty Administration including the Provost and Vice-President Academic, Faculty of Arts, Associate Dean, Vice-Provost and Dean Yeates School of Graduate Studies (YSGS); Associate Dean YSGS, Graduate Program Director of the Graduate Program, and meetings with Faculty, a group of current students, and support staff.

The PRT site visit was conducted on March 5 and 6, 2019. The PRT report was communicated to the Associate Dean, YSGS on April 15, 2019, and the response to the report from Philosophy and the Faculty of Arts was communicated on October 29, 2019.

### **Program Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities**

The Peer Review Team identified program strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, outlined below.

#### **Strengths**

- The MA Program in Philosophy at Ryerson University is a unique and vibrant MA program located in the heart of downtown Toronto.
- The department within which the Program is situated is remarkably diverse intellectually—a fact that is clearly valued by students.
- Data collected by the Department suggests that current students are unanimous in agreeing that they would recommend the Program to other potential students, and are unanimous in their satisfaction with the quality of their faculty supervisors.
- The Program has a very low attrition rate.

#### **Weaknesses**

- Unfortunately, graduate student funding continues to be an issue. In particular, funding for the students' second year of the MA is not guaranteed, and this is a potential barrier to the recruitment and retention of excellent students.
- Several students expressed frustration with the fact that financial need forced them to take on substantial off-campus employment during the school year, employment that affected their ability to produce excellent work.
- As noted, the graduate students are generally satisfied with their program and with the department. They did, however, express some concerns that were important to them (pertaining to communication

of expectations, space, and introduction to the professoriate). These are concerns that the PRT believes could be addressed by the Program with minimal difficulty.

### **Opportunities**

- We see opportunities for increased recruitment, both nationally and internationally.
- Although Ryerson's Philosophy Department is now quite large, boasting 20 full-time faculty members, there is no question that the Program would benefit from an additional faculty member.
- The program would benefit from the ability to attract more international students. This would expand the 'pool' of applicants and increase the average quality of applicants.
- Finding and affording housing in Toronto is a pervasive problem among students in the Program. This situation is exacerbated for students who come from other provinces or other countries. Access to stable and affordable student housing would be hugely beneficial for the overall growth of the Program. We recognize that this is to a large extent beyond the Department's power to address.

## Summary of PRT Recommendations, Graduate Program and YSGS Responses, and Implementation Plan

### Academic Recommendations

Recommendation	Faculty Arts Response	Philosophy Response	Program Action Items Timeline & Lead Responsibility	YSGS Response
1. The Program increase the number of graduate courses offered in each of the Fall and Winter terms.	We will consider any written requests for new courses, yet are limited by budgetary constraints and faculty workload considerations.	The Program seeks to offer one more seminar in fall and in winter.	Chair will work with Dean of Arts to see if this is feasible.  Chair has begun negotiations for additional seminars in 2020-2021.  Lead: Chair	YSGS notes that decisions on the number of additional courses offered per year (if any) is at the discretion of the Faculty.  YSGS further notes that if the program wishes to offer any new courses not currently listed in the calendar, those courses will need to be added in accordance with Ryerson University Policy 127.
2. The department hire a tenure-track faculty member in the History of Philosophy.	We have approved this hire and look forward to reviewing any future departmental hiring needs and plans.	The dept. has already passed a motion that its next hire will have a specialty in history of philosophy.		YSGS supports the Program and Faculty response.

### Administrative and Financial Recommendations

Recommendation	Faculty Arts Response	Philosophy Response	Program Action Items Timeline & Lead Responsibility	YSGS Response
3. To stabilize funding for students.	The Faculty of Arts, YSGS and the Provost have recently injected additional funds to support graduate students.  We are also holding grant-writing workshops and will ensure that students in this program are informed/ invited.	The Program will: a) will use departmental funds for small scholarships;  b) will work with students to make them more competitive in pursuit of OGS's and SSHRC's.	(a) GPD will consult with Chair during admissions cycles about dept.-funded scholarships;  (b) (i) faculty will provide feedback on their students' applications; (ii) faculty will hire more students as RA's and (iii) students will be urged and mentored to give conference presentations.  Lead: GPD	YSGS supports the Program and Faculty responses.  YSGS notes that the university recently invested substantial funds in graduate scholarships through the creation of the Ryerson Graduate Scholarships and the distribution of YSGS carry-forward funds in June 2019. YSGS will continue to advocate for increased funding for graduate students.  YSGS also notes that it offers workshops for external scholarships and encourages the Program's students to attend (where applicable).

<p>4. Funding for the second year of the MA be guaranteed and, if possible, increased.</p>	<p>We support departmental commitments to 2nd year students and will do what we can to communicate with students any commitments to and opportunities for 2nd year funding.</p> <p>We have recently announced changes to how TA/GA allocations will be administered which we hope will help with this matter.</p>	<p>The Program will:</p> <p>a. Guarantee offers of employment as T.A.'s or G.A.'s to 2nd year students in admission offers and publicize it and</p> <p>b. Will explore whether small departmental scholarships for 2nd years can be guaranteed to students when admission is offered.</p>	<p>a. Guarantee of employment to 2nd years (who want to work and whose first year T.A. performance has been satisfactory) to be posted on website.</p> <p>GPD will communicate the posting to webmaster in September for next admissions cycle.</p> <p>Lead: GPD</p> <p>b. GPD to meet with Chair. Meeting to take place by Feb. 2020 before admission decisions are made.</p> <p>Lead: GPD</p>	<p>YSGS supports and commends the Program's and Faculty's efforts to pursue options for improved funding packages for all students, including in their second year.</p>
<p>5. The student lounge be retained for use by graduate students in the Program.</p>	<p>Space is limited at Ryerson however we will consider the program's requests and needs.</p>	<p>The Program is committed to maintaining the grad student lounge.</p>		<p>YSGS notes that space issues are outside of its purview. It does, however, support the Faculty's consideration of the Program's request.</p>

<p>6. The Program take steps to increase its visibility as a place to pursue an MA in Philosophy.</p>	<p>The Faculty of Arts is assisting programs with the revising of their program brochures and is in the process of organizing a Faculty of Arts Graduate Fair to help showcase our programs to interested undergraduate students.</p>	<p>The Program will (a) hire a part-time communications officer to make effective use of social media, etc.; (b) will post on website more information about faculty members' research and areas of supervision competence; (c) will explore hosting an undergrad conference where MA can be promoted</p>	<p>a. GPD will discuss with Chair the hiring (after consulting with Arts' Communications and Marketing staff). Hope to hire communications officer to begin work in fall 2019 to increase application numbers for next admissions cycle. Lead: GPD</p> <p>b. GPD will invite faculty members to write their letters to prospective applicants. Will post letters on website in Fall 2019. Lead: GPD</p> <p>c. GPD will meet with UPD to discuss an undergrad conference. Initial meetings in Fall 2019. Lead: GPD</p>	<p>YSGS supports the Program and Faculty responses. YSGS also notes that it has returned to graduate fairs in Southern Ontario this fall, has increased its marketing budget, is working with University Relations to update its marketing campaign, and will explore other opportunities to increase the visibility of graduate studies at Ryerson.</p>
<p>7. The Program increase the number of international applicants to the Program.</p>	<p>We will work with the program and YSGS to consider any options to increase the number of International students admitted to the program.</p>	<p>The Program will seek a commitment from YSGS for a small, annual intake of international students not contingent upon domestic intake.</p>	<p>GPD will make the case for international students to the YSGS Dean and/or YSGS Associate Dean, Programs. GPD will meet with YSGS Dean and/or Associate Dean in Fall 2019</p>	<p>The Vice-Provost and Dean of YSGS will meet with representatives of the Program and Faculty to discuss increasing the annual intake of international students.</p>
<p>8. Opportunities for academic work (both as TAGA's and RA's) across campus be better communicated to students in the Program.</p>	<p>We support this initiative. We also have revamped how the Faculty of Arts TA/GA allocations will happen in the future, which we hope will assist with this matter.</p>	<p>GPA will inform students before each term begins of their eligibility to apply for any jobs posted on T.A.G.A.; 2nd-year students will be encouraged to apply for marking jobs for BUS 221 Business Decision-Making in cases where they are a good fit.</p>	<p>GPD will liaise with instructors regarding BUS 221 marking contracts and the timing of the postings. GPD will inform students of G.A. postings for BUS 221. Lead: GPD</p>	<p>YSGS supports the Program and Faculty responses.</p>

A report on the progress of these initiatives will be provided in the Follow-up Report which will be due in one year from the date of Senate approval.