Department of Philosophy

About the Department

Since its founding forty years ago, the Stony Brook Department of Philosophy has assumed a leadership role in the discipline due to its distinctive profile and productivity. It is a robust program whose distinctive profile is a unique strength in Continental philosophy, coupled with methodological pluralism, strong resources in the history of philosophy, and an interface with Anglo-American philosophy. Its faculty members are engaged in important analyses of the social structures by which human beings interact with and understand themselves and the world. The profession has followed the Department in its increased emphasis on interdisciplinary research and its recognition of the need for philosophy to engage with urgent contemporary problems. Productivity measures such as publication and citation indexes indicate the department's leadership in fields from phenomenology and feminism to aesthetics and cognitive science. Its distinguished visiting professor series has included such eminent thinkers as Noam Chomsky, Jacques Derrida, Angela Davis, and Juergen Habermas.

Since 1975, its first graduation year, the Philosophy Department has graduated 197 PhDs, many of whom play leadership roles in the profession. Standard indicators (GREs, GPAs, placement, competitive prizes, and fellowships) show our graduate students to be among the very best at Stony Brook and nationally. The Department has a thriving M.A. program in philosophy and the arts in Manhattan that explores philosophical aspects of fine arts and architecture. It graduated 60 students since May, 2003. No other advanced degree with a comparable concentration exists in the metropolitan area.

The Department is a leading contributor to undergraduate education, evidenced by its role in the general education curriculum, where it is one of the most popular electives in several categories, and in the leadership that Department faculty have displayed in creating and teaching in collaborative undergraduate programs such as the Honors College, Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center, Asian American Studies, Women's Studies, and Project WISE (Women in Science and Engineering). The Department plays an exemplary role in the integration of interdisciplinary studies. Its faculty members also have a role in "public philosophy," in reaching audiences beyond the discipline and the University, by writing for and appearing in public media.

Programs

Our PhD program is one of the most renowned in North America and indeed internationally. The PhD Program emphasizes Continental philosophy but includes analytic philosophy and the history of philosophy as essential and central components, in addition to a required interface with another discipline. Given its careful integration of all three components, the program systematically promotes a balance of philosophical styles and interdisciplinary work. It also has, and will seek to expand, several international exchange programs.

The Department runs an MA program in Manhattan, the "M.A. with a focus on Philosophy and the Arts." The program explores philosophical aspects of the fine arts (painting, sculpture, drawing, and installations) as well as architecture. It also examines aspects of the art world that can be illuminated by philosophical analysis (e.g. museum and exhibition culture, art criticism, and art theory). No other advanced degree with a comparable curriculum exists in the New York metropolitan area. In the next 25 years, we will be expanding this program, and institutionalizing a mutually beneficial connection with the Art Department.

The Department offers an undergraduate major and range of undergraduate minors, including minors structured to individual student interests and needs. The program covers the full range of the current DEC requirements for a department in the humanities. It also offers occasional courses in Chinese, Japanese, and Islamic philosophy, popular offerings which we envision continuing to provide. In the next 25 years, as well, the Department will be implementing a BA/MA program.

The Future

The Department will continue to emphasize interdisciplinary research and seek interdisciplinary collaboration in research and teaching in a variety of fields, including aesthetics, philosophy of science, and global justice. We will create a BA/MA program, and grow our MA program in Manhattan by activating a second track on global justice, to offer a unique focus at the intersection of transnational mobility, health, race, and gender, as well as theoretical issues in ethics and political philosophy.

Interdisciplinary connections to be developed include philosophy of science and technology, cognitive science, and philosophical psychology. In these we currently have small but active programs that combine Anglo-American and Continental contributions, with interdisciplinary connections to other Stony Brook programs and resources. At the same time, we will continue to expand our already close collaboration with colleagues in the arts, literature, women's and gender studies, and cultural studies.

Our challenge is how to carry out these projects in an era of tight budgets and fewer TA lines. Accordingly, we have scaled back our graduate offerings to about 5 graduate seminar offerings a semester, and revamped our prospectus program. We need to make sure, however, to continue to offer the graduate seminars that will allow PhD students to complete their course work within the allotted time (2 years). We have been successful placing our alumni, even in these austere times, because they have been well prepared in the history of philosophy and in a pluralist outlook. We have implemented changes in our admissions process.

As the quality of our undergraduates increase -- very noticeable in our classes -- we have to plan to devote more effort and attention to recruiting majors and motivating them to pursue honors in philosophy. Over the last couple of years we have seen an increase in the students that qualify to be honors students, but have not been able to serve them appropriately. We will have more of the tenured faculty shift their

teaching from the Ph.D. towards the MA and upper division of the BA. To this end, we plan to expand our rotation policy in the 100 and 200 level courses. Over the last decade we have had a policy in which faculty volunteer to teach at least once a semester a 100 level class. We will expand this to at least one 100 or 200 level every semester. This will allow us to ensure that we are able to maintain our level of course offerings that service the DEC.

The Department of Philosophy envisions itself maintaining its distinctive and pioneering emphasis on 20th century Continental philosophy – including phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, critical theory, feminism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction – while incorporating analytic philosophy and history of philosophy as essential components. During the next quarter-century, we shall be developing new paradigms of problem analysis that will lead to creative solutions pertinent to our local institutional and community issues on Long Island as well as to broader global challenges. We will put our expertise in the disciplined analysis of dilemmas that arise in diverse settings to use in ways that are at once rigorous and imaginative, pointing to new directions and thought and action.