



The Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Ben-Gurion University
Response to Committee Recommendations of March 2023

	Essential	Response 2023
1	Ensure frank and regular communication between the senior management and the Department and empower the Department to determine the specific ways in which it will implement University-wide recommendations and mandates	<p>Departmental Response: We enjoyed an excellent relationship with the outgoing Dean and look forward to a similar one with the new Dean who is beginning her term now. As mentioned during our meetings with the Committee, the plans for expanded provision of humanities services courses is one which the Philosophy Department has already begun to implement.</p> <p>If we are allowed to hire in order to fill the upcoming faculty openings and thus keep the Department at full strength (9 full time faculty), and if we are given a free hand to determine the content of the courses, we are confident that we will be able to teach the four credits of service courses which were requested of us prior to the University's approval of our last hiring process.</p>
2	Continue to conduct all faculty searches using international best practices.	<p>Departmental Response: We strongly concur with this recommendation and will of course implement it. The searches we hope to conduct in the coming year will involve a call for applications (Hebrew and English, published through all the usual platforms), a two-stage sifting process – from all available applications down to a preliminary short-list, and then from a preliminary short list to the list of invited candidates who will be invited to campus for both a colloquium job talk and an interview afterward with the full faculty plenum.</p>
3	Make sure that the provision and potential expansion of outreach courses involve all of the following: (a) details of execution should be left to the Department; (b) most outreach courses, especially those developed for particular groups of student majors, should be offered to students early in their university careers;	<p>Departmental Response: Again, strong agreement here. We have already developed a suite of service courses (in Philosophy of Science, Metaphysics for non-philosophers, and a new one we will be trying this year – on the philosophical, moral, and social implications of Artificial Intelligence). We will also try to develop a formula for a history of philosophy course that can work for the general student public.</p>

	<p>(c) such courses should have the appropriate support for their development and execution, especially in the form of TAs.</p>	<p>The benefits of such courses for the students getting their first exposure to philosophy in such a framework should be clear.</p> <p>However, in order for such courses to work for the Department, there are two important points to consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It would be best if philosophy services courses were taken during the first year of students' degrees – perhaps during the spring semester – in order to increase the likelihood that at least some of these students will then add a philosophy minor or dual major to their degrees. 2. Currently, service courses do not receive TA support below a registration of 60 students. We would ask the University administration to lower this bar, since the more humanities services courses are offered the less likely any one of them is to reach such a high registration, and such courses represent a significant time-commitment especially for young faculty before tenure who need to maximize research capacity. <p>Moreover, having a TA will enable teachers to give assignments throughout the semester (rather than just one final exam or paper at the end) and this greatly facilitates learning and retention of knowledge.</p>
4	<p>Keep the Department from falling below the current number of FTE (9).</p>	<p>Departmental Response: This recommendation and recommendation #5 are absolutely crucial for the Department's flourishing, and indeed its survival, so we will respond to them together: Since the Department is about to lose its specialist in Early Modern Philosophy and also its most interdisciplinary faculty member (in terms of both teaching and research interests) immediate replacement of these two faculty members in the coming school year is absolutely imperative in order to prevent the department entering a kind of death spiral.</p> <p>We cannot, for example, be a serious research and teaching department without someone who specializes in the thought of the founders of modern philosophy, such as Descartes and Spinoza, particularly when the departments in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv do have such specialists. Without an ability to teach and supervise creditably in these areas, the Department will get its clock cleaned – in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. We have already begun</p>

		the process of requesting permission to begin these job searches, and are hopeful of support from the University Administration.
5	Replace the two faculty positions vacated by the departure of Noa Schein and the imminent retirement of Yakir Levin without delay.	See Section 4 above.
6	Continue to conduct all faculty searches using international best practices.	See Section 2 above.
7	Ensure that all information pertaining to tenure is transparent and available to entering junior faculty.	Departmental Response: The Department currently appends a full tenure and promotion memorandum to the official acceptance letter received by every new hire. In addition, the university's mentoring program, handled by the Unit for New Academic Faculty under the Rector's office, offers guidance and support. It is an important point of contact by which we can ensure faculty are meeting tenure requirements by careful joint planning. Our policy is that each new faculty members has ongoing conversations with their mentor, other faculty members whose input is relevant, and the Department Chair, in order to reach the desired end of promotion and tenure in the most effective way.

	Important	Response 2023
1	Investigate creative ways to expand coverage, including reciprocal arrangements with other Israeli institutions to allow BGU students to take courses at these other institutions for credit, and perhaps vice versa.	Department Response: There is currently an option for students to receive credit at BGU for courses they have taken in other universities, but as yet no reciprocal arrangements between Universities for students to take classes <i>during</i> their degree, but at a different institution. This would require some solution to monetary questions surrounding tuition and the cost of credits taken by students at a University other than their home institution. We suggest that the possibility be investigated at the Faculty and Administration levels.
2	Investigate the possibility of introducing some new cross-disciplinary degree or program that makes sense given the current and projected strengths of the department and other cognate areas, such as, e.g. perhaps, a Bachelor of Philosophy, Economics, and Psychology (BPEP).	Departmental Response: We are very much in favor of setting up such an inter-disciplinary program. Since there are already four PPE programs in Israel (in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, the Open University and Haifa, with a fifth on the way in the Tel-Aviv Yaffo College) we believe that a Philosophy, Economics and Psychology degree, as suggested by the Committee or an interdisciplinary degree linking Philosophy with Computer Science, Linguistics, Mathematics and/or Cognitive Sciences along the lines of programs like "Symbolic Systems" at Stanford,

		<p>Logic and Methodology of the Sciences at UC Berkeley, or the Logic, Computation and Methodology Program at Carnegie Mellon, would be a superb addition to BGU's degree offerings and the first of its kind in Israel.</p> <p>In submitting our request to undertake 2 job searches in the coming school year, the Department expressed its willingness to focus one of the searches on a candidate who would be suitable for such a program.</p>
3	Integrate formal reading, speaking, and writing requirements in English into required courses.	<p>Department Response: While the Department recognizes the importance of strengthening English proficiency among the student body, this must be done carefully, especially in the B.A. Degree (in the M.A Degree we do have students who regularly choose to submit their papers, and on a few recent occasions, their entire thesis, in English). Reading, as such, is not the problem, since we already require students to read a considerable dose of English during their degree.</p> <p>We will encourage students to speak in English in classes offered in that language, and to submit their papers in English, but we do not think it should be made into a hard and fast requirement, since this is likely to create a virtually irresistible temptation to use ChatGPT and other AI tools as a crutch when writing in what is for almost all students a second, and sometimes third, language.</p>
4	Extend the completion period for the research-track MA to three years	<p>Departmental Response: Though the Department now has a fast track one-year MA program, and we strongly believe that most students should finish within 2 years, this time frame is not entirely realistic for all types of philosophy master's students (especially those studying historical subjects which also require language training). Hence, we find ourselves having to ask for a third-year extension for virtually all of our students. To date, the third-year extension is granted automatically, however. Any decision to move from a two year to a three year MA program is one that must be taken at the level of the CHE and the University level.</p>
5	Convert the secretary's position to a regular full-time job with full benefits.	<p>Departmental Response: This is a question of basic justice. On May 28th, 2023, the Department submitted to the HR Department another detailed request (the third, or perhaps even the fourth such request!) for converting the position</p>

		<p>to a full time one. We have still not heard back. The Department would be grateful for any help from the University administration in bringing this matter to a satisfactory conclusion. We note that this recommendation shouldn't be a difficult one to implement. The Department will continue to do whatever is necessary to make it happen as soon as possible.</p>
6	<p>Improve the gender balance among faculty and students.</p>	<p>Departmental Response: The Department very much hopes to be able to hire at least one female scholar - hopefully two - in the two upcoming job searches. The issue of gender balance among the student body is more complicated, since no department controls the pipeline of available student applicants.</p> <p>However, we will continue to make efforts to improve the gender balance there as well. We will consult the Office for Gender Equity to determine how these important goals might be met most effectively. Dr. Jacob Abolafia will be giving a course this coming year in Feminist Epistemology, and our hope is that this will attract new female students not currently enrolled in the philosophy program.</p>
7	<p>Find ways to increase the number of Arab students.</p>	<p>Department Response: We will consult the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to determine how this important goal might be met most effectively. We will also consult colleagues in other philosophy departments to learn how they contend with the matter.</p>
8	<p>Add greater diversity to course syllabi.</p>	<p>Departmental Response: The Department has already begun implementing this suggestion. Dr. Abolafia's course offerings (for example, on the Frankfurt School and on feminist philosophy) have added classes that have never, or very rarely, been taught before at BGU. We are hoping that one of the upcoming two hires will be able to offer a range of new courses comparable to those offered in the past by Prof. Levin on such a wide variety of subjects.</p> <p>However, the only immediate way in which to increase course offerings is through adjunct teaching, which will require at least some increase in a Departmental budget that has actually declined by more than a third over the past three years, thereby severely restricting our ability to broaden the study program's offerings.</p>

	Nevertheless, we have been exploring ways of collaborating with other units on campus to offer courses that will be of interest to students of both units and enable sharing the cost. For example, this coming fall, we will be offering a course in the philosophy of mathematics for mathematicians and philosophers. This two-credit course will be jointly funded by both departments and signals, we hope, more joint projects in the future.
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	Desirable	Responses 2023
1	Increase the steady-state size of the department from 9 to 10 FTE when resources allow.	<p>Departmental Response: We firmly believe that increasing the size of the department will greatly add to our accomplishments – and beyond the proportional weight of a single position. It would not only allow us to diversify our course offerings considerably and thus increase both the attractiveness of the Study Program and our presence in the University, but it would also help greatly in strengthening the Department’s position vis a vis the Israeli philosophical community overall.</p> <p>Naturally, the number of philosophy majors and graduate students in this country is not unlimited, and we are competing for a part of that cohort with departments that are larger than we are (sometimes double our size, and sometimes even more than that) with correlatively larger course-offerings and research specializations. Increasing our FTE lines from 9 to 10 would, we think, very much increase our chances of attracting more undergraduates and graduates to Be’er Sheva – a consummation devoutly to be wished.</p>
2	Recruit a specialist in medieval Islamic Philosophy.	<p>Departmental Response: We nearly managed to hire an Islamist last year. Such scholars are, unfortunately, an exceedingly rare bird in Israel. However, we will list Islamic philosophy as one of the areas of specialization which we are looking for in one of the two upcoming hires or define these searches as open in the hope of attracting an Islamist.</p>
3	Investigate and incentivise (e.g. by offering some teaching relief for preparation) ways to expand departmental course offerings by encouraging faculty to develop courses outside of their current areas of specialisation.	<p>Departmental Response: We completely agree that offering some teaching relief in order to enable preparation of new courses – especially courses outside a faculty member’s current AoS – is highly desirable.</p>

4	Do more to prepare students for the (non-academic) job market by establishing mechanisms at the university- or faculty-level to offer information and assistance to students regarding, e.g. relevant job opportunities and how to compose CVs and cover letters that emphasise the work-relevant skills such as close reading, analytical thought, effective communication that they have acquired through their academic training.	Departmental Response: The University has an Office of Career Development. We will consult with them, and work in close collaboration, to determine how this important goal might be met most effectively.
5	Secure contact information for the Department's alumni and invite them to participate in the University in an ongoing way through, e.g. public seminars and social gatherings.	Departmental Response: We do indeed keep a list of alumni emails and send updates about Departmental news. However, that list itself ends up needing frequent updating since email addresses change with changes in workplace, residence etc. and it is at this point that many of our alumni drop off the radar screen. We will, therefore, work to augment alumni communications.
6	Coordinate with other departments in Israel to share the cost of international visitors.	Departmental Response: This is an excellent suggestion. We will set up a committee of the Heads of the various Philosophy departments and related programs in Israel (such as the Cohen Center for the History and Philosophy of Science) which will pool information and coordinate about upcoming philosophical events, and about speakers being invited to Israel by any department so that other departments may also invite them during their stay in the country.