THE VOICE OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE CONVERSATION OF THE CAMPUS

The Vision

The Philosophy Department finds itself confronted by a set of interrelated challenges. First, it must have a clear research orientation and focus, an identified and recognized area of strength to serve as the foundation for its fledgling graduate program. Second, this research emphasis must also provide all those offerings needed for its majors (now 150) and yet also help service the humanities requirements for other majors as well. Third, its chosen research profile should mesh well with other programs in the Division and on campus. Fourth, it must do this in a way which can be accommodated within promised provisions and ongoing financial constraints.

A workable method for successfully addressing these challenges, however, lies ready at hand. For UC-Santa Cruz has long taken seriously, welcomed, and institutionalized interdisciplinary work. The Department of Philosophy belongs to and claims for itself this legacy. This emphasis area we term the History and Philosophy of Science, Technology, and Society (HPST&S). Analogous faculty strengths define programs at, e.g., LSE and UCSD. Commitment to this focus has already been manifested by the Department in its most recent hires. As outlined below, this approach directly meets the challenges facing the Department while simultaneously providing significant benefits for the Division and the campus.

There now exist core faculty groups in the Philosophy Department, within other units of the Humanities Division, and in the Division of Social Sciences which form a vibrant and cohesive focus area (graduate and undergraduate) related to HPST&S. Areas of investigation here range across a variety of topics, including but not limited to how scientific views evolve, the intellectual and social factors driving change, and the ethical and policy implications of the sciences as funded and practiced. In addition, this emphasis bridges both analytic and continental traditions in philosophy, and allows us to preserve and maintain that intellectual breadth and diversity.

The Philosophy Department already has a number of cross-listed courses with departments in and out of the Division. It actively seeks to forge opportunities for interdisciplinary relationships. For example, negotiations have begun with Biology exploring the possibility of having a philosophy of biology course cross-listed for majors as well as a graduate course in the Ethics of Stem Cell Research to be taught for graduate students in Biology (MCD) and Bioinformatics. With a growing presence as well as existing strengths on campus of the natural sciences and engineering, this emphasis offers a way of both attracting students here and helping educate those (graduate and undergraduate) on site.

The Department also seeks to develop a secondary area of strength in the history of philosophy, such as ancient philosophy. Two of our most recent hires work in history of philosophy, one of whom has ancient as his primary area of research. Many trained in this area have strengths in other core areas of philosophy (typically, ethics, metaphysics,
or history and philosophy of science). Such scholars connect as well with departments outside of philosophy, e.g., to History or the Classics Program.

Moreover, a strength in history of philosophy (e.g., ancient) requires just two people (one must be senior). Within the discipline, history of philosophy remains a core area. Hence, graduate students trained in this field are well situated within the very competitive job market. History of philosophy constitutes a staple for any undergraduate program. In sum, creating this as an area of strength fills a gaping hole in the undergraduate curriculum, enhances the graduate program, and connects with other departments.

The Challenge

The Philosophy Department has witnessed growing curricular gaps due to retirements and other separations. The Department could better serve its students and the campus by having ladder faculty able to teach in areas such as: social and political philosophy (including a once burgeoning undergraduate courses in environmental ethics), feminist philosophy and theory, and non-Western philosophies.

The effect has been to significantly impact the Department’s ability to deliver both required and standard portions of its undergraduate and graduate programs as well as to limit the Department’s ability to service related programs. An instance of this is the lapsing of a co-taught course with Environmental Studies on Environmental Ethics because we no longer have anyone who teaches in this area.

These considerations underscore the imperative of finding a mechanism which permits the Department to build and strengthen its Ph.D. program, its undergraduate major, and to do this while integrating with the programmatic aspirations and teaching needs of other units in the Division and on the campus. However, the Department’s needs present an opportunity and not just a challenge.

The Opportunity

Currently (2005), the Department has 10 ladder faculty (four Full Professors, one Associate Professor, and five Assistant Professors). The planning assumptions rely on commitments made to the current Chair at point of hire and reaffirmed in the most recent divisional hiring plans approved by the Humanities Council of Chairs last year. This entails a Philosophy Department of 12 ladder faculty at build out.

In its recent hires, the Department has made tangible its commitment to the general vision. As separations occur or new provisions become available, at least one hire should be at the senior level in each focal area, i.e., philosophy of science and in the history of philosophy, particularly ancient philosophy. This needs to be done in order to insure and secure the viability of the graduate program. Graduate programs cannot (successfully) be mounted on the backs of junior faculty. Given the needs of the Department, its aspirations, and its plan, near term hires would be drawn from following range of academic specialties:
• A (preferably) senior hire in philosophy of science, ideally one able to do interdisciplinary teaching and who bridges different philosophical traditions.

• At least one hire at the junior level in social and political philosophy, but with competency to teach at all levels “applied” topics related to environmental, engineering, or biomedical policy issues.

• A possible CCI-related hire to increase the diversity of the Department’s curriculum (e.g., Asian philosophy). The ideal candidate would also have philosophical specialties related to at least one other identified need area.

• A (preferably) senior hire in history of philosophy, such as ancient philosophy, who would give us a secondary graduate strength in that area.

All hiring would be toward the end of enhancing interdisciplinary, interdepartmental, and interdivisional connections as well as increasing diversity within the Department.

The Department embraces as well a commitment to excellence through diversity, as emphasized by Chancellor Denton and the Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity of the Academic Senate. Faculty should provide students with a broad range of experiences and perspectives. In this regard, the department has been pro-actively soliciting new Ph.D.s for UC Presidential Postdoctoral Fellowships. An important goal in departmental hiring will be to achieve better gender and ethnic representation.

The ability to teach traditional core areas however remains very much intact, e.g., metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of language. But these areas would not be what defines this Department at the graduate level. Rather, UCSC Department will continue to develop strengths in various areas of “philosophy of …” (science, social science, etc.) and very strong competencies in history of philosophy.

The Goal

Success in promoting a graduate program destined to remain numerically relatively small in a resource challenged environment requires creating an “opportunistic” academic niche, one that fits within the evolving campus plan. The academic vision and hiring agenda outlined above call for no more than those resources already committed to the Department of Philosophy over the next five years. From these it would be possible to fashion a Philosophy Department at UCSC in the same league with the History and Philosophy of Science units at programs such as LSE, the History and Philosophy of Science Program at the University of Pittsburgh, and the science studies unit at UCSD within the next five to ten years. This would place the Department well within the top dozen philosophy of science, technology, and society programs in the world. While the goal may sound ambitious, ample precedent nationally indicates that with judicious hiring and proper focus such stature can readily be obtained by programs such as the one we have here.