

Final Assessment Report

Cyclical Review of Undergraduate and Graduate Programs

Department of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts

2024–2025

May 13, 2026

I. Programs evaluated:

- Honours BA Philosophy
- Honours BA Ethics and Political Philosophy
- Joint Honours BA Philosophy and Political Science
- Major in Philosophy
- Major in Ethics and Political Philosophy
- MA Philosophy
- MA Philosophy and Specialization Medieval and Renaissance Studies
- MA Philosophy Specialization Feminist and Gender Studies
- PhD Philosophy
- PhD Philosophy Specialization Canadian Studies

II. Review process (outline of visit)

This Final Assessment Report on the aforementioned programs was prepared from the following documents: (1) the self-study brief produced by the academic unit; (2) the external reviewers' post-remote visit report; and (3) the responses from Mitia Rioux-Beaulne, Director, Department of Philosophy; and Marc Charron, Dean, Faculty of Arts.

The visit for the review of the undergraduate and graduate programs took place on Tuesday, October 28 and Wednesday, October 29, 2025. The external review team consisted of Jimmy Plourde, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières; and Paul Fairfield, Queen's University.

During their visit, the external reviewers met with Alain St-Amant, Vice-Provost, Academic Affairs; Christopher Fennell, Associate Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; Marc Charron, Dean, Faculty of Arts; Jada Watson, Vice-Dean, Programs, Faculty of Arts; Mitia Rioux-Beaulne, Director, Department of Philosophy; and members of faculty, administrative staff and students.

III. Summary of program quality reports¹

a. Strengths

- Students report a high level of satisfaction with the courses offered and the quality of instruction.
- The courses, which cover all areas of philosophy, are offered in English and French.
- The variety of specialized interdisciplinary programs provides undergraduate students with a range of interesting options.
- A Department-commissioned evaluation shows that the programs prepare students well for employment.

b. Challenges

- The programs have some of the lowest enrolment of Francophone students in the Faculty, making it difficult to maintain a full range of courses in French.
- The Department offers a wide range of service courses in the first and second years of the undergraduate program. As a result, first- and second-year students have little sense of belonging, and retention rates are low at those levels.
- The number of regular professors in the Department has fallen over the past 15 years, with the result that all first- and second-year undergraduate courses are taught by part-time faculty. At the same time, it is difficult to recruit enough qualified part-time professors, especially in French.
- Many undergraduates do not know how a degree in philosophy can help them in the job market. Consequently, the data provided by the University shows a low conversion rate from admission offers to enrolment.
- The doctoral comprehensive examination is spread out over two terms, which is longer than at other universities. Additionally, students report unclear expectations regarding the examination and, to a lesser extent, the written assignment for the non-thesis option.
- Graduate students say that the available funding is insufficient and, at the doctoral level, that the program is too short. As a result, many students have to work off campus to pay for their education, which slows down their progress in the program.

¹Based on the documents prepared during the review process, often cited verbatim.

- Many students—and even some professors—are unaware that the Faculty offers funding for graduate students to attend conferences.

IV. Summary and assessment of the proposed implementation plan²

The external reviewers' recommendations were carefully considered by the director of the academic unit and subsequently incorporated into an implementation plan, which was examined by the Senate Program Evaluation Committee (SPEC) at its meeting on May 13, 2026.

The director of the academic unit agrees with all of the external reviewers' recommendations. The action items and timelines are clearly articulated and have been approved by the Dean of the Faculty. The SPEC is satisfied with the academic unit's Response and Implementation Plan.

V. Conclusion

The review exercise confirmed the strength and stability of the programs offered, and it identified recommendations for their ongoing improvement. The SPEC would like to thank the external reviewers for their detailed assessment, as well as all stakeholders involved in this cyclical review process.

VI. Schedule and timelines

A progress report describing the actions taken and results achieved will be submitted no later than December 15, 2028.

The next cyclical review will take place in 2031–2032.

²The academic unit's Response and Implementation Plan is appended.



Unit Response and Implementation Plan

This document will be submitted to the Ontario Universities Quality Assurance Council and posted on the University's website. It should be written in only one language, English in this case. At the end of the process, the document will be translated into the other language.

Faculty:

- Faculty of Arts

Unit:

- Department of Philosophy

Programs evaluated:

- Honours BA Philosophy
- Honours BA Ethics and Political Philosophy
- Joint Honours BA Philosophy and Political Science
- Major in Philosophy
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- MA Philosophy
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- MA Philosophy Specialization Feminist and Gender Studies
- PhD Philosophy
- PhD Philosophy Specialization Canadian Studies

Cyclical review period:

- 2024–2025

Date:

- 2026-02-23

General comments:

On February 11, 2026, the Director of the undergraduate, master's and doctoral programs in Philosophy and in Ethics and Political Philosophy was made aware of the External Review Report produced in the context of the cyclical program evaluation. We were pleased with the positive evaluation of our programs. Since our programs are committed to providing an outstanding educational and research experience, we were gratified to see that the external reviewers found that our "undergraduate and graduate curricula are excellent," that "the programs prepare students adequately for employment," and that "the syllabi and student work submitted" demonstrate "that the course content is consistent with that of similar programs." The report makes seven recommendations, one of which is considered *urgent*. We take all of the recommendations seriously and feel confident that by taking the measures suggested below, our programs will become stronger. The Department of Philosophy unanimously voted its approval of the implementation plan as described during its departmental assembly on February 27, 2026.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Keep pursuing the recently initiated renewal of regular professors in philosophy not only to allow the department to pursue its development projects, but also to enable them to provide quality teaching in large service courses and the core domains of their philosophy programs.

Unit response:

Of course, implementing this recommendation is not entirely within our control, since staffing levels are first determined by the central administration and then by the Faculty of Arts. That said, the recommendation highlights our ability to offer service courses to large groups. The Department is committed to taking this priority into account when setting its hiring goals for future staffing cycles. In that regard, it is worth noting that we have *already* identified a hiring opportunity for the ethics of artificial intelligence, in which we expressed our desire to develop a course that would specifically address the issue of the uses of artificial intelligence. We would be prepared to offer this course to the entire University community. Furthermore, someone hired in that area would, by definition, be qualified to teach the ethics courses we already offer to the entire University community.

Decanal response:

The Dean notes the external reviewers' recommendation and the Department's response. Faculty renewal is a shared priority and part of the ongoing discussions between the Department and the Dean's Office regarding faculty resource planning.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 1:

Action 1
Description: Set our hiring priorities based on our service course needs.
Priority level: * Urgent.
Assigned to: According to our by-laws, this responsibility falls to the Departmental Teaching Personnel Committee (DTPC).
Timeline: As soon as hiring is possible.

Curriculum change? No.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Run a diagnostic survey among students who gave up their undergraduate program in philosophy to identify the reasons why the rate of lost students in the first two years of study at the undergraduate level is so high. Check if any of the identified reasons are related to issues in the undergraduate philosophy programs that could be improved and make sure if there are any such reasons, that they are addressed.

Unit response:

We believe that conducting such a survey is highly relevant. The Department's Undergraduate Studies Committee will prepare such a survey and distribute it at the end of the 2026 winter term with the assistance of the Institutional Research Unit. The exercise will target students who have dropped out of the program during that academic year. A preliminary compilation of the results will be conducted during summer 2026, which may inform an initial reflection workshop. We will repeat this exercise in the coming years to see if any patterns emerge that could help us develop targeted actions.

Decanal response:

The Dean encourages the Undergraduate Studies Committee to conduct a diagnostic survey to better understand the student experience in undergraduate programs. An annual survey will provide valuable insights that will help the Department revitalize its programs. The Dean's Office stands ready to assist the Department in that process.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 2:

Action 1
Description: Conduct a diagnostic survey among first- and second-year students to identify risk factors for dropping out.

Priority level: * Urgent.
Assigned to: Undergraduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Spring 2026.
Curriculum change? No.

Action 2
Description: Develop targeted measures to reverse the trend of students dropping out of philosophy programs.
Priority level: * Important.
Assigned to: Undergraduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Summer 2026, then ongoing.
Curriculum change? No.

Action 3
Description: Continue monitoring dropout rates and adjust the measures taken to reverse the trend.
Priority level: * Advised.
Assigned to: Undergraduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Ongoing, 2026–2030.
Curriculum change? No.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Elaborate a departmental strategy to put into place different measures that will ease the transition of students to the job market and address the perception of many students that a degree in philosophy might constitute a professional dead-end.

Unit response:

We take note of this recommendation and find it particularly relevant, given the public perception of our discipline (as one with limited job prospects), which often differs from reality (the low unemployment rate among philosophy graduates). The Department's current leadership had already floated the idea of holding informal talks on the career paths of philosophy graduates. This recommendation encourages us to continue on this path. Since this is a clear concern, we are also considering incorporating modules on these topics into the program's required courses, so as to expose students to these issues and help them better understand how to showcase their skills in the job market. One measure that could prove particularly effective in this regard would be to introduce a fourth-year course in which students would have the opportunity to undertake a professional project, ranging from a research thesis to a community engagement project or experiential learning in the form of an internship. Lastly, as part of the ongoing revision of our by-laws, we plan to establish a position for an alumni relations officer, whose mandate will be to maintain contact with our alumni. This will allow us to learn more about our students' career paths and share this information on our website.

Decanal response:

Like the Department, the Dean's Office is concerned with the public perception of the disciplines in the Faculty of Arts. We therefore encourage the Department to continue with the projects described here and recommend that experiential learning be incorporated into the appropriate courses. Philosophy students could be encouraged to participate in the recently launched "Faculty of Arts Innovation Labs" (or equivalent courses in other faculties, such as Telfer Innovation Sprints, the FSS Challenge, etc.), which promote cross-faculty collaboration among University students on real-world problems. The Dean's Office is pleased to support such initiatives.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 3:

Action 1

Description: Create an alumni relations officer position.
Priority level: * Urgent.
Assigned to: Director, Department.
Timeline: Spring 2026.
Curriculum change? No.

Action 2
Description: Organize a series of talks on the career paths of philosophy graduates.
Priority level: * Important.
Assigned to: Director, Department and/or Career Services and Alumni Relations.
Timeline: 2026–2027 and following academic years.
Curriculum change? No.

Action 3
Description: Incorporate professional development modules into the program’s required courses.
Priority level: * Advised.
Assigned to: Undergraduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: 2027–2028 academic year.

* Priority level: 1. URGENT-IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT: Action to be implemented within a maximum of 18 months 3. ADVISED: Action to be developed and discussed, then implemented by mid-cycle, i.e., within four years.

Curriculum change? No.

Action 4

Description:

Develop a fourth-year course that allows students to complete a career-oriented project encapsulating their learning, in the form of a research thesis or a community engagement and experiential learning project.

Priority level: * Advised.

Assigned to: Undergraduate Studies Committee.
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Timeline: 2028–2029 academic year.

Curriculum change? Yes.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Clarify, improve implementation, and revise the planned progression for the Ph.D.

Unit response:

Most of the measures proposed by the external reviewers are considered highly relevant and have already been taken into account by the Department since the changes that were made to the doctoral program in 2023 and 2024. Those PhD program modifications have not yet spanned a full four-year cohort cycle. Consequently, definitive assessment regarding improvements to on-time thesis completion rates cannot be performed at this stage. Consequently, it seems a bit hasty to us to overhaul the application review process right now for example, before we have even had a chance to assess the impact of the new system on an entire cohort. That is why we are postponing this measure slightly, while making every effort to prioritize the other aspects of this recommendation.

Decanal response:

The Dean's Office agrees with the Department that it would be premature to undertake a complete overhaul of the doctoral program before the cohort enrolled in the new, revised structure has completed the program's major milestones. We therefore support the Department's position that it would be important to review the program's components, including the application process, only after a four-year cycle has been completed. In addition, developing a handbook would be extremely helpful for students. The Vice-Dean, Programs and the Graduate Studies Team could review the document to ensure that students have access to additional resources.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 4:

Action 1
Description: Develop a clearer student handbook that better outlines the expectations for each milestone in graduate programs, and ensure its widespread distribution and online availability.
Priority level: * Important.
Assigned to: Graduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Summer 2026.
Curriculum change? No.

Action 2
Description: Create a chart outlining the milestones to be met in graduate programs and post it in a visible location in the Department.
Priority level: * Important.
Assigned to: Graduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Summer 2026.
Curriculum change? No.

Action 3
Description: Review the format of the doctoral comprehensive examination and revise it as necessary.
Priority level: * Advised.
Assigned to: Graduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Summer 2030.
Curriculum change? Yes.

* Priority level: 1. URGENT-IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT: Action to be implemented within a maximum of 18 months 3. ADVISED: Action to be developed and discussed, then implemented by mid-cycle, i.e., within four years.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Move forward with the creation of a planned multidisciplinary master’s program offering courses in AI ethics.

Unit response:

Discussions regarding the creation of this master’s program have already begun, involving representatives from the Schools of Law, Social Sciences and Engineering. The format of this master’s program is still under discussion, but the idea has already generated a lot of interest. The Department of Philosophy is already working on developing its structure and forming an inter-faculty committee tasked with establishing its parameters.

Decanal response:

The Dean’s Office fully supports continuing these discussions. The relevant faculties have expressed interest, and we are currently setting up the interdepartmental committee and beginning to work on developing the master’s program in AI ethics.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 5:

Action 1
Description: Develop, in collaboration with all stakeholders, a template for the program (scheduled to launch in September 2027).
Priority level: * Important.
Assigned to: Director, Department and Graduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Fall 2026.
Curriculum change? Yes.

* Priority level: 1. URGENT-IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT: Action to be implemented within a maximum of 18 months 3. ADVISED: Action to be developed and discussed, then implemented by mid-cycle, i.e., within four years.

RECOMMENDATION 6: *Create two other mandatory courses for first- and second-year philosophy students only.*

Unit response:

The Department of Philosophy considers this measure to be highly appropriate and effective in fostering a sense of belonging to a cohort. A discussion about the content these courses should cover was begun at a departmental assembly, and the Undergraduate Studies Committee is expected to continue the discussion this year. Since adding two required courses in both languages effectively amounts to a teaching load equivalent to four courses, this places a significant burden on human resources. We therefore think it is wise to make these additions gradually and to tweak the current course structure at the same time in order to continue offering a high-quality program.

Decanal response:

The Dean's Office agrees that new, required courses should be created gradually as part of a broader curriculum review process. The Vice-Dean, Programs will support the Department in this process to ensure that the changes implemented result in a program that current faculty will be able to implement.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 6:

Action 1
Description: Create a new, required second-year course.
Priority level: * Important.
Assigned to: Undergraduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Fall 2026 (for implementation in fall 2027).
Curriculum change? Yes.
Action 2

* Priority level: 1. URGENT-IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED 2. IMPORTANT: Action to be implemented within a maximum of 18 months 3. ADVISED: Action to be developed and discussed, then implemented by mid-cycle, i.e., within four years.

Description: Create a new, required second-year course.
Priority level: * Important.
Assigned to: Undergraduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Fall 2027 (for implementation in fall 2028).
Curriculum change? Yes.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Develop a departmental action plan and a strategy to increase the number of French-speaking students in the philosophy programs, especially at the undergraduate level.

Unit response:

This recommendation is fully in line with the goals the Department has set for itself in recent years. The plan we are developing is based on two main areas: (1) expanding our network with French-language secondary schools and colleges/Cégeps in the region *through* Ethics Bowl Canada, which provides significant visibility for our institution; (2) Strengthening our ties with Cégeps in the region (for Quebec). The first of these initiatives has been under way for two years, but our goal is to further establish it as a major regional event in the coming years. As for the second area, some of our French-speaking students are already teaching at Cégep de l'Outaouais and at Collège Universel in Gatineau. We will try to capitalize on this situation to maintain our ties with these institutions and use them to gain a better understanding of what might motivate students to pursue studies in philosophy—and to implement this knowledge at our institution. In fact, meetings have already taken place between the Director, Undergraduate Studies and representatives from Cégep de l'Outaouais. The idea of developing a program specializing in teaching at the Cégep level warrants careful consideration, and from this perspective could be the subject of close collaboration with the philosophy departments of regional Cégeps. Since we are already in the process of establishing a master's program in the ethics of artificial intelligence, such an option should be considered at a later stage, with a view to launching it in the fall of 2029.

Decanal response:

The Dean's Office encourages the Department to develop and implement this strategy, which aims to strengthen ties with French-language secondary schools and colleges/Cégeps in the region in order to increase the number of French-speaking students enrolled in philosophy programs. The Department could also consider recruitment initiatives, such as "mini-courses" or visits to local schools.

Actions to be undertaken for recommendation 7:

Action 1
Description: Continue and expand the network <i>through</i> Ethics Bowl Canada and by adding two more schools to the event each year.

Priority level: * Important.
Assigned to: Director, Department and the Ethics Bowl Canada Organizing Committee.
Timeline: Fall 2026 and ongoing.
Curriculum change? Choose an item.

Action 2
Description: Strengthen direct ties with Cégeps in the Outaouais region by meeting with departmental officials and developing collaborative projects.
Priority level: * Important.
Assigned to: Director, Department and/or Undergraduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: First meeting: Spring 2026, to plan an activity for the following fall.
Curriculum change? No.

Action 3
Description: Assess viability and, if appropriate, establish an MA program or a specialized track within our current program for teaching philosophy at the college level.
Priority level: * Advised.
Assigned to: Graduate Studies Committee.
Timeline: Fall 2029.
Curriculum change? Yes.