Report on Assessment 2016
Program in Philosophy

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In academic year 2015-16, the Program in Philosophy reviewed the prospectus or dissertation proposal. The task was assigned to the Curriculum Committee, a group of students and faculty members, which reported its findings and new proposals to the Program’s Executive Committee.

Students come to the prospectus after they have advanced to Level 3, having completed all course work and successfully written and passed their two Qualifying Papers. Thus the prospectus is the first task for students who have advanced to the final stage in their graduate education, and is supposed to reflect their preparedness for writing a dissertation.

**Learning goals** for the prospectus include: understanding of how to structure an argument covering the length of a dissertation; familiarity with the field that argument takes place in; capacity to add to philosophy. The prospectus itself does not have to advance the field or argue for the length of a dissertation, but it should indicate the candidate’s ability to do so.

For **information to be used in conducting a review**, the Curriculum Committee composed a questionnaire that it then sent to all alums for whom the Program has contact information. The questionnaire (“Alum Survey”) is attached.

The Committee’s **findings** emerged from the questionnaire. Although the results were not always conclusive, one common thread was that the prospectus felt like the bottleneck in students' progress toward the completed dissertation. Partly this was because the prospectus had not been adequately defined, and students didn’t always know what they were supposed to put into it. In addition there was an institutional history of a long prospectus, an institutional history that caused students to spend more time on this stage of their projects than they needed to.

One **proposed change** suggested itself – indeed nothing else seemed relevant by comparison. The Program needed clearer guidelines for the prospectus, and the prospectus needed to be shorter. In addition, it needed to be submitted together with a sample from the coming dissertation. This sample would both let the prospectus committee see what it could expect from the dissertation, and get the student to start writing the dissertation before being examined on the prospectus (thus avoiding the present letdown after the prospectus exam).

The Curriculum Committee wrote a proposal for new prospectus guidelines. That proposal went to the Program’s Executive Committee, was sent back for revisions, and returned to the Executive Committee in its meeting on April 2016, where it was passed. It is attached.

**Next** the Program hopes to find that this change in the prospectus results in more timely completion of future prospectuses. When the cycle returns to this topic, Philosophy will survey all present and former students who submitted a prospectus during or after May 2016.