VI. Conclusions

In recent years, our graduate program has enjoyed increasing success as the number and quality of applications has increased. We have established and maintained a good reputation nationally, though we would like in the coming years to move up in the rankings to at least the top five. There are two chief pressure points that keep us from moving up: insufficient support for graduate students, and too few faculty.

Many of our competitor MA programs offer assistantships with full tuition remission. We are able to offer competitive stipends, but the few waiver system is not transparent, so that we can’t give prospective graduate students a precise number when they ask what they will pay for tuition. If we could offer a complete tuition and fee waiver with our assistantships, we would draw even more and stronger students away from our competitors. Our ability to support our graduate students has depended heavily on work study, course fees, and special-emphasis money from the graduate school. Federal work study dollars are never guaranteed, and in these uncertain times, are more at risk than ever. We hope to continue receiving special-emphasis funds, but that depends on the Graduate School’s continued ability to provide those funds. We have been able to increase our course fees, but not to that point that it makes up the difference.

The faculty we have are highly qualified, and do an excellent job. Our national stature has improved with the hires we made in the last six years. Still, we have difficulty offering both enough upper-division courses for our undergraduate majors and graduate seminars for our graduate students. We try to minimize the number of piggy-backed courses, but sometimes that is the only way to meet demand. Also, there is consistent pressure on our lower-division, core-curriculum courses. If we had the faculty to staff those courses, and/or enough graduate assistants to increase class sizes, we would be able to meet that demand better.

Our faculty cover a wide enough range of specializations to offer sound graduate training in most of the core areas of philosophy. Two areas where we are not as strong as we need to be are Ethics and Metaphysics. Currently, we have three faculty members who teach Ethics courses, but none of them have Ethics as their main specialization. One is and Aesthetician who works also in Philosophy of Law; one covers Ancient Philosophy, and in particular does work on Aristotle’s Ethics; and one is a specialist in Social and Political Philosophy. If we could hire someone whose core specialization was Ethics, he or she could offer graduate training in Ethics and free up the other three to do more work in their main areas of research. Likewise, we have several faculty who can teach courses in Metaphysics, but since the retirement of Ed Averill, we have not had a faculty member who specializes in Metaphysics. Since Metaphysics is one of the traditional core areas of philosophy, this is a significant soft spot.

In general, we have been able to pursue our mission in graduate education very well. Our facilities are adequate (though more classroom space for large lectures would be welcome), we have adequate office staff, and we have enough money for equipment and general operations. We have received lots of support from the graduate school and the college of Arts and Sciences. A small investment of resources would allow us to go to the next level.