September 26, 2003

To: CAP AND THE OFFICE OF THE SENIOR VCAA
From: The Philosophy Department, Division of the Humanities

**CRITERIA FOR NORMAL MERIT ADVANCEMENTS**

**Section I: Introduction**

APM – 210 provides criteria for Appointment, Promotion and Appraisal. Having carefully read this well-crafted and thoughtful document, the philosophy faculty came to the considered conclusion that it was unnecessary to repeat the contents of this reasonable document in this report. Therefore, in responding to the request from CAP, the faculty of the Philosophy department tried to determine how best we could supplement the information in APM –210 to help CAP with the evaluation of normal merits in the Philosophy Department. After much discussion, we adopted the assumption that the topic on which we could be most helpful concerns research in philosophy.

On the matter of teaching, we typically adhere to guidelines in APM-210. In our department regular merit advancement normally depends on meritorious contributions in the standard areas of undergraduate and graduate teaching and mentoring. These contributions may be given additional weight in a merit advancement when faculty take on especially onerous or demanding challenges and/or achieve exceptional success in the areas of undergraduate and graduate teaching, mentoring, and related instructional activities. In assessing a file for a normal merit advancement, we look carefully at all indices of participation in undergraduate and graduate education, including special syllabus preparation, and other special investments in education, and we try to reach a balanced conclusion regarding the merits of the file.

On the matter of academic service, advancement normally depends on some meritorious academic service to the department, the university, and/or the profession. These contributions may be given additional weight in a merit advancement when faculty take on especially onerous service obligations and/or achieve exceptional success in meeting or surpassing expectations. Obviously, there are many kinds of meritorious and exceptional contributions of academic service, recognized and evaluated in merit advancement. (Again, see APM – 210 (especially p. 7.) The department has adhered to these standards, and itemizes the candidate’s service, paying attention to differences in kinds of service.

In what follows, we begin (Section II) with a very general and brief characterization of research in philosophy: what it looks like, and how it we evaluate it. These general remarks are followed in Section III by a description of what is expected for each rank in terms of research.
Section II: Research in Philosophy

1. General Remarks on the Discipline

Philosophy is now, and has always been, a broad discipline that spans a wide range of problems and questions. Traditionally, philosophical questions encompassed theoretical matters such as the nature of thought, consciousness, and free will, and practical matters such as the nature of morality and good government. Also addressed are questions about the nature of logic, mathematics, religion, and art. Argument, analysis, and a panoramic command of the intellectual landscape are at its core. Research on philosophical topics normally involves three things: (1) a deep understanding of the history of the problem and the variety of proposals used to address and solve it, (2) a command of contemporary attacks on the problem, including critical analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of current research developments, and (3) new theories, explanations or analyses aimed at solving specific problems, often drawing on relevant material in one or more of contemporary science, mathematics, political science, economics, or jurisprudence. The best research in philosophy excels in one of these three domains. Additionally, however, it is anchored by a strong expertise in the others. Each of the three is pertinent, putting a unique demand on the scholar.

As will be evident from the foregoing, philosophy as a discipline differs from experimental fields, such as oceanography or anthropology. Where relevant, philosophical research embraces experimental results to create a synthesis across many disciplines, such as (a) political science, economics, and history, or (b) physics, neuroscience, and psychology. Normally philosophers do not produce much in the way of experimental data, though there are notable exceptions. Consequently, research productivity in philosophy looks very different from that of sociology or experimental physics, for example. Normally, the foundation for a philosopher’s research program is laid down in his/her years as an assistant professor, with the high-impact book or cluster of articles appearing during the period as an associate or full professor. Expansion and development into new areas typically occurs at the full professor levels.

The disciplinary demand for breadth, in both historical and contemporary ideas, and for depth in critical analysis and originality, means that high quality articles and books cannot be cranked out like sausages. Padding a CV by minor rewriting of a first-rate paper is one strategy philosophers sometimes take advantage of in order to approximate the productivity profile typical of the experimental sciences. Although somewhat understandable given the academic climate, resorting to padding is deplorable, and our department neither encourages nor rewards the ‘one-article re-heated’ tactic.

Like our colleagues in other departments, we do wish to emphasize that quality of research is a paramount consideration for merit advancement and promotion. The sine qua non for evaluating research consists in reading the work carefully, critically discussing it a department meeting, and exercising our professional judgment. As requested, we do enunciate flexible criteria for a normal merit advancement.
Nevertheless, we realize full well that formal criteria cannot do the assessment of research quality for us. Satisfaction of certain formal criteria may constitute evidence for some aspect of productivity, but it is not a substitute for genuine, critical, peer evaluation. The criteria are guidelines, but they are only guidelines. In the next section, we briefly outline features of a normal productivity profile in our field. In what follows, we explain in a little more detail what is involved in research in philosophy and what distinguishes some research as excellent.

2. General Remarks on Research Output

The three major modes of individual research expression, in ascending level of importance, are

1) the conference or colloquium presentation (typically unpublished),
2) the research paper, published in a) a refereed journal or b) an edited anthology, singly authored (typically) or jointly authored (occasionally). This may include substantial review papers, critical notices, or lengthy book reviews.
3) the book, singly authored (typically) or jointly authored (occasionally).

Items in category 1) are especially important as entry-level contributions in the earliest stages of a career, but they remain a significant measure of academic activity for mid-career and even senior-level researchers. Items in category 2) are the primary bread-and-butter of almost any research career, and will normally constitute the bulk of anyone’s career-long research contribution. Critical review papers of a large field of literature focusing on a general topic may also, depending on quality and impact, be included as important contributions to research in philosophy. Items in category 3) are produced more rarely than research articles. Some scholars who are normally and quite meritoriously productive in the first two dimensions will conclude a career without ever producing a book-length publication. For others, one book in a career (other than one’s Ph.D. dissertation, of course) would be normal; two would be laudatory; three or more would be unusually productive. Additionally, for historians, a valuable contribution based on years of careful research may consist of scholarly editions of primary work or a translation of primary literature (e.g., Greek, Latin, German, and French) into languages used more widely across the world today, such as English.

Beyond these primary divisions in the venue of public presentation, the specific character of the written work is crucially relevant to evaluating its merit. Perhaps heading the list of presumptively virtuous productions are a) those less common pieces that advance genuinely new theories or explanatory proposals that bear on major issues in the field. Next in line would be b) those more frequent pieces that propose or explore fundamental criticisms of existing theories and explanations. Here too would be included major review papers, including those found in publications such as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and large, substantive book reviews, such as those published in the New York Review of Books or the London Review of Books. Also worthy, and especially important within Philosophy in particular, are c) interpretive
pieces that place an old issue in a new and revealing light. In all of these cases, philosophy publications tend to be rather longer than is typical in other disciplines, owing to the highly theoretical, interpretive, and argumentative nature of most of our research. (An occasional exception here would be papers in Logical Theory, which often tend to resemble publications in Mathematics: brevity can be a notable virtue.)

These divisions provide a 3 x 3 matrix of research-presentation types, of which items in 3a (books that advance new theories) would presumptively be the most important and items in 1b and 1c (conference presentations of a critical or interpretive nature) would presumptively be the least important. But, by itself, this matrix does not take into account the intrinsic excellence or quality of the piece under evaluation, at any given place within the nine categories just outlined. That is an independent variable that can be properly evaluated only by scholars working in the relevant area. Hence the importance for any merit or promotion file of the judgments provided by the department as a whole, and by external referees. Trying to provide mechanically-applicable criteria for evaluating the excellence of a given piece, in place of such broad professional judgment, is a fool’s errand. Once must simply ask those who know, and see what consensus emerges.

3. Discursive Aside

The word “normally” figures prominently in our discussion in Section III and deserves brief explanation. As is customary on this campus, we recognize that there is prototypical research production for a normally meritorious professor in our field. We also recognize that sometimes meritorious research comes in different forms that cannot be precisely specified. For example, occasionally, in well-recognized circumstances, one paper may have an exceptionally profound impact on an entire field and perhaps even on distant fields. Evidence for impact and the significance of the contribution includes the following: other colleges use it in classes or seminars, it is reprinted in various edited collections, it is the focus of conference symposia, it is the target of much other published discussion, it is widely cited, it launches a new subfield, and so on. Likewise, not all books are equal: one minor book that has negligible impact is not as significant as one major creative book that pulls the field into a new development. Some books never get reviewed or included in graduate seminars; other books regularly are. Sometimes an exceptionally significant contribution is published in an electronic journal rather than in a prestigious paper journal. Electronic journals (referreed) are likely to be increasingly important as the price-gouging practice of academic publishers becomes unacceptable. Some of the most creative and important papers are now published in electronic journals. As in all fields, sometimes new developments threaten the “conventional wisdom”, and brilliant papers may not get recognition in the conventionally characterized “top journals”. Given these considerations, we make frequent use of “normally” to allow for judicious flexibility.

With Section II as background, we hope the criteria descriptions below will be useful, but we also wish to warn that they should not hammered into a mechanical bean-counter. Nor should they become an impediment to the faculty’s exercising its professional judgment. (See also APM – 210 p. 5 & 6)
Section III  Normal Research Profile at Distinct Ranks

1. Assistant steps that do not involve a promotion to a new rank or advancement to a barrier step:

Research:
*Normally*, at least one substantial paper per year (published, or accepted), or the equivalent (e.g. two shorter but sound papers) or demonstrated progress on a systematic research project, possibly, but not necessarily, a book. Participation at the level of the profession; i.e. giving talks at meetings, by invitation, etc.

2. Associate steps that do not involve a promotion to a new rank or advancement to a barrier step:

Research:

*Normally*, either
(a) *on average*, publication or acceptance of one to two substantial research papers per year, published in respectable, peer-reviewed scholarly journals and/or high-level collected editions (may include substantial review papers published in venues such as the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, substantial book reviews published in venues such as *The New York Review of Books*, *Nature*, *London Review of Books*, etc.), or

(b) substantial and visible progress on a creative, major research project such as a book. This could include a translation of an important text or a new edition of an important text.

Visibility in the profession, in the form of giving talks at meetings, or by invitation is also expected.

3. Full Prof. steps that do not involve a career review promotion or advancement to a barrier step:

Research:

*Normally*, either
(a) *on average*, publication or acceptance of one or two substantial research papers per year, published in respectable, peer-reviewed scholarly journals and/or high-level collected editions (may include substantial review papers published in venues *such as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, substantial book reviews published in venues *such as The New York Review of Books*, *Nature*, *London Review of Books*, etc.), or
(b) substantial and visible progress on a creative, major research project such as a book. This could include a translation of an important text or a new edition of an important text. Visibility in the profession, in the form of giving talks at meetings, or by invitation is also expected.