



**GRAND VALLEY  
STATE UNIVERSITY**

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**DEPARTMENT OF  
PHILOSOPHY**

*Strategic Plan*

Grand Valley State University  
Allendale, Michigan

12 May 2008



# I. Historical Identity of the Philosophy Department

Since the founding of GVSU, a public college/university distinctive in its commitment to liberal education, the Philosophy Department has been at the center of this mission. Our contribution has included continual articulation of the meaning of that commitment in relation to changing social and cultural conditions and the growth of the university. We have maintained rigorous faithfulness to the mission of liberal education in teaching—recently reaffirmed in the GVSU Mission, Vision, and Values Statements—and in the many forms of direct relationship with students within learning community.<sup>1</sup> Philosophy faculty have taken leading roles in a variety of programs and curricula vital to liberal education at GVSU.<sup>2</sup>

Philosophy has been understood to be at the core of the university since its founding, beginning with the influence of Harry Jellema, our first department Chair, on the initial curriculum of the College (GVSC). In this tradition, liberal education at GVSU has been at root a philosophical commitment, a matter of considered choice as to value, purpose, and direction in education. This is perhaps most immediately visible in our university's long-standing and ambitious (and costly) offering of General Education in the mode of liberal education, with regular faculty, discussion size classes, student writing, and primary texts. Consistent with an understanding of “philosophy” as more than one discipline among disciplines, and instead as a practice and a way of orienting education that underlies and cuts across the other disciplines, the Philosophy Department has defined itself as a “relational discipline,” encouraging students to double major and faculty to pursue significant involvements with other programs and departments on campus.

The Philosophy Department has enjoyed a national and international reputation for excellence and innovation in philosophy generally, through our faculty's leadership in a variety of professional associations, presentations, and publications. Our reputation as a department has been centered on two of its most distinctive attributes. First, we have defined philosophy as something more than only a discipline to be studied. In our program description as well as in our teaching,

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<sup>1</sup> See Stephen Rowe, ed. *Claiming a Liberal Education* (Ginn Press, 1990, '92, '94, '98) and Whipps, et. al., eds, *Reflection and Engagement: Liberal Education at Grand Valley State University* (Copley, 2001, '03, '05).

<sup>2</sup> Examples of such leadership include the following: the 2004 GVSU mission statement deliberations (Phyllis Vandenberg and Judy Whipps); General Education Program revision (Kelly Parker); directing the Liberal Studies Department (Stephen Rowe and Judy Whipps); interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching with the sciences (Teresa Castelão-Lawless); CLAS Associate Dean for Students and Curriculum (Maria Cimitile); the Seidman Center for Business Ethics (Michael DeWilde); the Middle Eastern Studies Program and Model Arab League (Coeli Fitzpatrick); the Philosophy Club (Ronald Loeffler); the Arts & Humanities Divisional Curriculum Committee (Mark Moes); the East Asian Studies Program (Peimin Ni); Honors College (Mark Pestana and Coeli Fitzpatrick); the China Study Abroad Program (Peimin Ni and Geling Shang); the GVSU Pre-Law Program (John Uglietta); the Environmental Studies minor (Kelly Parker).

service, and scholarship we have defined and enacted philosophy as an activity and a practice, a way of being human.<sup>3</sup> This is evident in our commitment to teaching, in the many awards for both teaching and scholarship which have been received by our faculty, and in the generation of innovations such as the Working Classics Service Learning Program<sup>4</sup>, our Colloquium and Teaching Apprenticeship programs, and on-site teaching of Eastern Philosophy in China.

A second attribute has been our pluralism. As a department focused on excellence in undergraduate education, we have embraced a variety of philosophical schools and approaches to philosophy. From the early days the department resisted the tendency of American philosophy departments to become dominated by the Analytical School, maintaining its grounding in Classical Western Philosophy, and later adding the American Pragmatic tradition, Eastern Philosophy, Professional Ethics, Philosophy of Science, Continental Philosophy, Feminist Philosophy, Service Learning, Islamic Philosophy – and Analytic Philosophy as well. The secret of our being able to hold together such diversity has been our commitment to “teaching as a shared practice.”<sup>5</sup>

Through all of the changes and phases in the short history of GVSU, the Philosophy Department has remained steadfast in its commitment to liberal education as a living ideal. And as a department which is especially concerned with critical thinking and the critical function of the university in relation to what is currently popular in society, we have sometimes stood as “the loyal opposition” against tendencies and temptations which could drive the university away from liberal education, into, for example, careerism, domination by graduate education, or consumerism. Indeed, in the current period we are concerned about the tendency to reduce and thereby harm the organic quality of learning community through excessive focus on accountability, standardized procedure, quantitative measure, and a business model of evaluation based on cost-benefit analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Peimin Ni, “Why Gongfu, and Not Just Action, or Worse, only Theory?” (lecture at Philosophy Department, University of Hawaii, Sept. 29, '06), and Stephen Rowe, *Living Philosophy* (Paragon, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Winner of the 2002 American Philosophical Association Award for Innovation in Philosophy Programs.

<sup>5</sup> One expression of this commitment, in addition to the success of our graduates in the world, is our hosting of the 2005 National Society for Student Philosophers Conference.

## II. Mission, Values and Vision

### *Mission:*

The philosophy department seeks to enrich and enliven the private, professional, and public lives of students and the community through the study of diverse philosophical methods and their use in critical inquiry concerning the ultimate questions of reality, knowledge, and value.

### *Values:*

We value excellent, effective, and engaged teaching aimed at developing rigorous analytical thinking, strong communication skills, and an attitude of openness and objectivity. We value excellence in scholarly activity, public discourse, and community service. We value administrative service to the department, the college, and the university.

### *Vision:*

The Philosophy Department will set a standard of excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service to the University and the community. We will develop students' abilities to question and wonder as well as their skills in analytical critical thinking, critical judgment, and communication. We will foster a diverse community of philosophical inquiry through the study of philosophy and its methods in different historical periods and different philosophical traditions.

## III. Strategic Goals and Objectives

The following table of goals and actions is derived from a list of 51 proposed actions, drawn from previous Strategic plans and newly suggested goals. The goals were prioritized by faculty in a survey in April 2008. Those rated the lowest priority were removed from the Strategic Plan; those rated highest were assigned a responsible person and time frame for completion.

TEACHING	Priority		Person Responsible	Time Frame	Resources
<b>Goal 1</b>		<b>Update Philosophy Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan</b>			
Action 1		Rewrite or discard Objective 1, Measure 1 in Assessment Plan	Assessment Committee	September 2010	
Action 2		Rewrite or discard Objective 2 and Measure 4 in Assessment Plan	Assessment Committee	September 2010	
<b>Goal 2</b>		<b>Improve basic skills instruction: Reading, Writing, Critical Thinking, Information Literacy</b>			
Action 1	High	Offer a 1 credit "Writing and Methods" class for Philosophy majors & minors	Maria Cimitile	January 2008	1-credit course overload
<b>Goal 3</b>		<b>Improve student:faculty ratios in accordance with Best Practices in Philosophy Education benchmarks</b>			
Action 1		Consider which categories of classes to target for adjusted class sizes			

ADVISING	Priority		Person Responsible	Time Frame	Resources
<b>Goal 4</b>		<b>Improve graduate school placement for majors who intend to continue in academic philosophy</b>			
Action 1		Create a mentoring/placement program for those of our majors who are planning to apply to graduate school		October 2009	
Action 2		Promote Undergraduate Teaching Apprentice Program			
Action 3		Enhance online information sources for graduate school advising			
Action 4		Improve our departmental contacts and visibility to colleagues at other institutions, both in West Michigan and nationally			
Action 5		Accurately track graduate school placement			
<b>Goal 5</b>		<b>Communicate more clearly internally and externally the <u>value</u> of philosophy and philosophical education.</b>			
Action 1		Improve visibility of Philosophy through public events, interdisciplinary projects, faculty governance			

<b>Goal 6</b>		<b>Recruit Philosophy Majors and Minors</b>			
Action 1		Promote double major option through Advising Centers and other departmental advisors			
Action 2		Increase our major contingent to 100 or more, with a proportional increase in our number of minors			
Action 3		Increase number of minority majors & minors			

<b>CO-CURRICULUM</b>	<b>Priority</b>		<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<b>Goal 7</b>		<b>Strengthen the “Second Curriculum”</b>			
Action 1		Organize Colloquia with external speakers			
Action 2		Increase attendance at colloquia by varying event times and increasing outreach			
Action 3		Publicize and promote Philosophy Club activities			
Action 4		Increase number of students in the Student Apprentice Program and/or university tutoring program			
Action 5		Increase participation in the annual Hoitenga Essay Contest			

PROGRAMS & CURRICULUM	Priority		Person Responsible	Time Frame	Resources
<b>Goal 8</b>		<b>Strengthen course offerings</b>			
Action 1	High	Consider minimum PHI 103 grade requirement for majors	Curriculum Committee	November 2008	
Action 2		Consider PHI 103 requirement for minors			
Action 3	High	Consider new curriculum opportunities that recently hired faculty bring (in Africana Philosophy and Philosophy of Language, for example)	Curriculum Committee	November 2008	
Action 4		Re-establish our China Summer program, which did not enroll sufficiently for Summer 2008			
Action 5		Consider proposing a Philosophy M.A.			
Action 6		Advise and help with Ethics across the Curriculum (courses in Bioethics, Business Ethics, etc.)			
Action 7		Contribute to the institution of a Religious Studies Program.			
Action 8		Contribute to the institution of an Environmental Studies major			
Action 9		Continue to develop and promote our involvement with other GVSU faculty, departments, and programs (e.g., reading groups, guest lectures, colloquia, consultations).			

FACULTY & PERSONNEL	Priority		Person Responsible	Time Frame	Resources
<b>Goal 9</b>		<b>Improve ratio of permanent faculty to 19 TT, 3 VIS, 2AFF</b>			
Action 1		Hire AFF faculty	Dept. Chair	August 2008	
Action 2		Formalize Joint Appointments for TT faculty who are contributing significantly outside PHI	Dept. Chair	August 2008	
<b>Goal 10</b>		<b>Promote faculty development</b>			
Action 1	High	Develop teaching evaluation plan for affiliate, visiting and adjunct faculty	Dept. Chair	Fall 2008	
Action 2	High	Develop mentoring plan (for teaching, scholarship, and service) for part-time faculty	Dept. Chair	Fall 2008	
Action 3		Continue to increase pluralism of faculty interests and expertise			
<b>Goal 11</b>		<b>Promote collegiality</b>			
Action 1		Return to collective engagement in the core issues of teaching and research, in department colloquia and other forums			
Action 2		Promote the scholarship of teaching as a regular aspect of collegial life			
Action 3		Encourage faculty participation in university events			

<b>Goal 12</b>		<b>Fine-tune staffing arrangements</b>			
Action 1		Balance adjunct reliance across Fall and Winter semesters			
<b>Goal 13</b>		<b>Hire faculty to permit adjustment to optimal class sizes (see Goal 3)</b>			
Action 1		Advocate for additional tenure-track faculty to meet these class size goals without significant loss in numbers of seats			

SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH	Priority		Person Responsible	Time Frame	Resources
<b>Goal 14</b>		<b>Provide opportunities and resources for faculty to engage in philosophical work (reading, reflection, dialogue)</b>			
Action 1		Ensure more financial resources for faculty to attend conferences			
Action 2	High	Advocate for greater library resources	John Uglietta, Coeli Fitzpatrick	April 2009	
Action 3	High	Hold on-going colloquia to discuss current faculty research and contemporary philosophical dialogue	Stephen Rowe, Geling Shang	Fall 2008	
Action 4	High	Increase resources for release time, travel, and other costs associated with devoting time to research, writing, and speaking	Dept. Chair	October 2008	

<b>Goal 15</b>		<b>Increase visibility and reach of faculty research activities</b>			
Action 1	High	Demonstrate the value of scholarship via exchanges with other philosophers (local, regional, national, international) as well as with other departments within the university		April 2010	
Action 2	High	Continue to attract internal and external recognition of faculty accomplishments in teaching, scholarship and service	Dept. Chair	April 2009	
Action 3	High	Promote the connection between scholarship and excellence in teaching: Articulate to faculty, administration, and the public what it means to occupy the middle ground between a research institution and a "merely" teaching university		April 2010	
Action 4		Host national conferences on topics where we clearly have some expertise			

SERVICE	Priority		Person Responsible	Time Frame	Resources
<b>Goal 16</b>		<b>Increase faculty and student involvement in larger community</b>			
Action 1	Low	Expand faculty involvement in Community Working Classics			
Action 2	Low	Expand faculty involvement in other forms of community service / civic engagement			

OTHER	Priority		Person Resp.	Time Frame	Resources
<b>Goal 17</b>		<b>Continue strategic planning process</b>			
		Conduct ongoing updates to strategic plan	Department Chair	Annually	

## IV. Moving toward Strategic Goals 3 and 13:

***Goal 3: Improve student—faculty ratios in accordance with Best Practices in Philosophy Education benchmarks.***

***Goal 13: Hire faculty to permit adjustment to optimal class sizes.***

In keeping with the values of the Philosophy Department and in hopes of contributing to the realization of the University Strategic Plan’s objective to “recruit, hire, and retain highly qualified faculty and staff in sufficient numbers...” in order to realize the goal of providing “sufficient infrastructure to support quality education,”<sup>1</sup> our department goal is to provide an optimal learning environment for students. To realize this goal, we regard it as both necessary and pragmatic (given the current fiscal state of the University) to maintain 3 or 4 full-time Visiting faculty positions (VIS), 1 or 2 Affiliate faculty positions (AFF), and minimal Adjunct faculty positions (ADJ) in our overall staffing configuration.

The number of PHI sections taught by TT faculty could be considered low. However, several significant factors contribute to this situation. In any given year, a small number of faculty are ordinarily on sabbatical leave. Philosophy TT are heavily involved in administrative duties: of the current 15 TT faculty with reduced teaching assignments, one is Chair of PHI (teaching 1 PHI course), one is Director of East Asian Studies (teaching 0-1 PHI course), one is Chair of LIB (teaching 0 PHI courses), one until May 2008 served as Associate Dean of CLAS (teaching 0-1 course). Aside from these administrative assignments, TT Philosophy faculty also teach varying numbers of courses each year in other programs including LIB, Honors College, East Asian Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, and History of Science. We are moving toward formal joint Appointments for such faculty in order to better reflect our actual staffing picture. The philosophy faculty is committed to participating in these areas as it furthers **Goal 5** of the departmental strategic plan of “Communicate more clearly internally and externally the value of philosophy and philosophical education,” with the particular concomitant Action 1: “Improve visibility of Philosophy through public events, interdisciplinary projects, faculty governance.” We are proud to be able to serve the university in these areas, and are committed to doing so in the future as we believe this participation contributes to the reflective and critical thinking skills of our student body.

The following plan assumes that ongoing outside teaching, research, and administrative commitments within PHI will remain similar to current levels. It also assumes that overall undergraduate enrollment at GVSU has stabilized, so that there will be no significant changes in numbers of PHI sections needed. Finally, it assumes that class sizes will remain at their present level. In the April 2007 Philosophy Department “Benchmarking and Best Practices” study a case is made for reduced class sizes in Philosophy courses. Given steady enrollment, such class size reductions would require from 4 to 7 additional faculty hires, as indicated in the table showing potential 2010-11 Course Capacity Adjustments.

<sup>1</sup> Grand Valley State University, *Strategic Positioning: Strategic Plan 2008-2010*, p. 7.

### **Current Staffing (Fall 2007 - Winter 2008)**

<b>2007-08 Staffing (Actual Schedule):</b>								
Faculty Type	# of Faculty*		% of Faculty		# Sections		% Sections	
	Fall	Winter	Fall	Winter	Fall	Winter	Fall	Winter
TT	11	13	47.8%	50.0%	26	26	40.6%	41.3%
VIS	6	6	26.1%	23.1%	24	24	37.5%	38.1%
AFF	2	2	8.7%	7.7%	8	8	12.5%	12.7%
ADJ	4	5	17.4%	19.2%	6	5	9.4%	7.9%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

\*Reflects all TT who taught at least one PHI course in the semester.

### **2007-08 Hiring Successes**

The Department has successfully filled 3 tenure-track positions with specialties in Continental, Analytic, and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Western Philosophy. All of these replace former faculty who resigned from GVSU (Drabinski, Giovanelli, and Sweet). A tenure-track hire in Classics has a joint appointment to Philosophy and will be teaching one course per year (Kelly Rudolph). This brings us to a total of 19 TT faculty, with 16 to 18 typically teaching PHI courses in a given semester.

We have also replaced an existing affiliate line, bringing the total number of affiliate faculty to 2 (Alexander and Hogg).

This gives us the following:

<b>2008-09 Staffing (Projected):</b>								
Faculty Type	# of Faculty*		% of Faculty		# Sections		% Sections	
	Fall	Winter	Fall	Winter	Fall	Winter	Fall	Winter
TT	16	16	64.0%	69.6%	37	42	56.1%	63.6%
VIS	3	3	12.0%	13.0%	12	12	18.2%	18.2%
AFF	2	2	8.0%	8.7%	8	8	12.1%	12.1%
ADJ	4	2	16.0%	8.7%	9	4	13.6%	6.1%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

This is a much improved staffing picture in terms of the ratio of TT to VIS, especially percentage of sections taught by TT. There is still too much reliance on adjunct faculty.

### **2010-11 Target: Staffing for Optimal Class Size**

We believe that our students deserve the best possible opportunity for maximum faculty contact. We made significant progress in adjusting toward optimal class sizes with the

2008-09 class schedule, setting the cap for all courses numbered 300 or higher at 30 seats (PHI 495 Capstone has always been at 20), and setting all courses numbered below 300 at 32 seats. As indicated in the Benchmarking Report (Sec. III.B.6), though, in most cases we still have some way to go before we reach what best practices indicate for optimal class sizes. At the same time, we realize that we cannot precipitously adjust class sizes downward without creating a serious shortage of seats for students. The first step is to define the best case scenario; then we can look at improvement in specific areas where progress will be easiest to achieve.

The following chart shows what staffing would be needed in order to reach full alignment with optimal class sizes:

<b>Course Capacity Overview</b>								
	<b>2008-09 Seats</b>				<b>2011-12 Seats</b>			
	<b>Cap</b>	<b>Sections</b>	<b>Capacity</b>		<b>Cap</b>	<b>Sections</b>	<b>Capacity</b>	<b>+ Sections</b>
<b>PHI 103</b>	32	14	448		30	15	450	1
<b>&lt;PHI 300 Non-SWS</b>	32	66	2112		25	84	2100	18
<b>SWS</b>	32	16	512		20	26	520	10
<b>Theme</b>	30	23	690		25	28	700	5
<b>Majors</b>	30	12	360		20	18	360	6
<b>Capstone</b>	20	2	40		20	2	40	0
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>133</b>	<b>4162</b>			<b>173</b>	<b>4170</b>	<b>40</b>

To achieve the best-case scenario, reducing class sizes to optimal size while increasing our proportion of tenure-track faculty actually teaching the classes, would require 7 additional tenure-track faculty (new lines) altogether. This is not a likely scenario in the near future. There are ways to approach the goal that are less resource-intensive: we could opt to include a few Visiting and/or Affiliate faculty in the mix; we could choose to address class size in all *but* lower-level non-SWS courses (this would require four rather than seven new full-time faculty); we could set our class size at a slightly higher number in some cases (a class size of 28 in lower-level non-SWS courses would require 5 additional TT lines rather than 7). There are many options for improvement and these must be discussed by faculty and administration. The data merely provide a way for us to look forward at what is possible.

### **Appendix i. 2008-09 Philosophy Faculty Competencies by Area**

*Includes new faculty who will begin Fall 08 (A. Spear, D. Tunstall, D. Vessey, K. Rudolph).*

<b>Ancient</b>	<b>Medieval</b>	<b>Early Modern</b>	<b>Late Modern &amp; 19<sup>th</sup> Century</b>
M. Cimitile	C. Fitzpatrick	R. Loeffler	G. Shang
R. Loeffler	M. Moes	G. Shang	D. Vessey
M Moes	M. Pestana	P. Vandenberg	
J. Uglietta		J. Uglietta	
K. Rudolph			

<b>American Pragmatism</b>	<b>Continental</b>	<b>20<sup>th</sup> Century Analytic</b>	<b>Aesthetics</b>
K. Parker	M. Cimitile	R. Loeffler	M. Cimitile
S. Rowe	K. Parker	A. Spear	D. Tunstall
D. Tunstall	D. Tunstall		D. Vessey
J. Whipps	D. Vessey		

<b>Ethics and Value Theory</b>	<b>Practical and Professional Ethics</b>	<b>Philosophy of Religion</b>	<b>Philosophy of Science</b>
M. DeWilde	M. DeWilde	M. DeWilde	T. C.-Lawless
R. Loeffler	K. Parker	M. Moes	R. Loeffler
M. Moes	J. Uglietta	S. Rowe	M. Moes
K. Parker	P. Vandenberg	G. Shang	
M. Pestana		D. Tunstall	
S. Rowe			
G. Shang			
J. Uglietta			
P. Vandenberg			

<b>Logic</b>	<b>Eastern Philosophy (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism)</b>	<b>Middle Eastern Philosophy</b>	<b>Philosophy of Mind</b>
M. Cimitile	M. DeWilde	C. Fitzpatrick	R. Loeffler

R. Loeffler	P. Ni		M. Pestana
M. Pestana	S. Rowe		J. Uglietta
A. Spear	G. Shang		
J. Uglietta			

<b>Philosophy of Language</b>	<b>Social and Political Philosophy</b>	<b>Philosophy of Law</b>	<b>Philosophy of Death and Dying</b>
R. Loeffler	T. C.-Lawless	J. Uglietta	M. Moes
M. Moes	M. Cimitile		P. Reitemeier (AP)
P. Ni	C. Fitzpatrick		
	R. Loeffler		
	M. Moes		
	M. Pestana		
	S. Rowe		
	J. Uglietta		
	P. Vandenberg		

<b>Philosophy of History</b>	<b>Feminist Philosophy</b>	<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Metaphysics</b>
M. Moes	M. Cimitile	T. C-Lawless	R. Loeffler
	J. Whipps	R. Loeffler	M. Moes
		M. Moes	M. Pestana
		A. Spear	G. Shang

<b>Comparative Philosophy</b>			
P. Ni			
S. Rowe			
G. Shang			

## ***Appendix ii. Permanent Faculty Hiring and Retention 2001-08***

### **Regular Faculty (Tenure-Track) Hires and Reassignments to PHI**

John Drabinski	<i>Hired 2001</i>
Alessandro Giovannelli	<i>Hired 2001</i>
Coeli Fitzpatrick	<i>Hired 2002</i>
Douglas Kindschi	<i>Joint appointment in Philosophy 2003</i>
John Uglietta	<i>Hired 2004</i>
Ronald Loeffler	<i>Hired 2004</i>
Kristi Sweet	<i>Hired 2006</i>
Andrew Spear	<i>Hired 2008</i>
Dwayne Tunstall	<i>Hired 2008</i>
David Vessey	<i>Hired 2008</i>
Kelli Rudolph	<i>Joint appointment in Philosophy 2008</i>

**Regular Faculty (Tenure-Track) Resignations and Reassignments outside PHI**

John Drabinski	<i>2003</i>
Maria Cimitile	<i>Appointment as Associate Dean 2005-2008</i>
Alessandro Giovannelli	<i>2006</i>
Kristi Sweet	<i>2007</i>
Judy Whipps	<i>Joint appointment in Liberal Studies 2007</i>
Coeli Fitzpatrick	<i>Joint appointment in COIS-Honors College 2008</i>

**Affiliate Faculty Hires**

John Alexander	<i>2007</i>
Charles (Robb) Hogg	<i>2008</i>

**Affiliate Faculty Resignations**

Noel Boyle	<i>2007</i>
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