

Philosophy at Illinois Wesleyan Threatened – Updated With Link to Petition

By
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The [Board of Trustees](#) at [Illinois Wesleyan University](#) (IWU) has proposed eliminating the school's [Philosophy Department](#), along with some other departments.

The proposal would discontinue the philosophy major and minor at the school and would likely involve the termination of all four philosophy [faculty](#) members—all of whom have tenure, and all of whom received unexpected “pre-termination” notices earlier this month.



According to a [story at the local NPR affiliate, WGLT](#), the pre-termination letters were sent to 21 other faculty in Anthropology, Religion, Sociology, the School of Music, and French and Italian, which, with the four from philosophy, is “about 21% of IWU’s faculty.”

The reason the Board of Trustees is threatening philosophy is not known. Following a recent review of academic programs at the university, neither the faculty nor the administration recommended ending the philosophy program and firing its faculty. The reasoning is not financial exigency, either, as the school has an [endowment of over \\$200 million](#).

The Board of Trustees gave the threatened departments a month to respond, and are scheduled to vote at a July 16 meeting on whether to close the Philosophy Department. But “potentially affected faculty told WGLT recently they still don’t know what they are supposed to respond to.”

In the WGLT story, IWU English professor Michael Theune is quoted as saying about the process:

It does become a bit alarming when you have a board making what feels like a unilateral decision. That’s scary because it’s not quite clear what shared governance means... The initial decision that a program be discontinued should first come from the faculty. I think we would generally view any action taken unilaterally by an administration or a board to elect to discontinue a program that hasn’t been recommended for discontinuation by the faculty as suspect under [\[AAUP\]](#) principles.

He adds, “I can’t imagine a liberal arts school without philosophers in it.”

UPDATE (7/1/2020): Aaron Garrett (Boston University) has created a [petition](#) objecting to the IWU Board of Trustees plan to shutter the university’s Philosophy Department, eliminate its philosophy major and minor programs, and possibly terminate four tenured philosophy faculty, noting that “the procedure by which this decision seems to be being made appears highly arbitrary and irregular”:

We the undersigned strongly request that the IWU administration reconsider this serious mistake, a mistake which will have great consequences for the reputation and mission of what until now has been a model SLAC. IWU states that its “primary focus in opening students’ minds.” The Philosophy Department is nationally recognized for its excellence and has played a central part in realizing this goal. This action by the Administration directly undermines this goal. By getting rid of the Philosophy Department IWU will be a liberal arts college no more.

You can read and sign the petition [here](#).

You can also send letters directly to the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Tim Szerlong, at tjszerlong@gmail.com and the President of IWU, S. Georgia Nugent at President@iwu.edu.