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UC San Diego Philosophy Department Ranked Top 20 in the Nation

Department's long-standing graduate program receives high marks for teaching and research in the philosophy of physics, philosophy of cognitive science, political philosophy and Kant

Based in part on an exceptional faculty with broad strengths in the philosophy of science, history of philosophy, philosophy of mind, and ethics, the University of California San Diego Department of Philosophy increased its international prestige by ranking as one of the top 20 Ph.D. philosophy programs in the United States.

Additionally, the department is ranked highly in a number of specializations, showing its excellence and impact across several distinct and central areas of the discipline.

In the [rankings published March 9](#) by Wiley Blackwell, the department jumps to number 20 overall, up three spots from the previous ranking published in 2014. The new ranking sees the department move back into the top 20 for the first time since 2006.

“The recognition our philosophers and our department continually receive is indicative of strong leadership and devoted, engaging faculty members,” said Division of Arts and Humanities dean Cristina Della Coletta. “The biggest winners are our current and future students — they are in good hands, with a department that we’ve long known serves our community well.”



Back row, from left: Department faculty members Dana Nelkin, Reuven Brandt, David Brink, Don Rutherford and Craig Callender, with MSO Debra Ambrose and chair Jonathan Cohen. Front row, from left: faculty members Manuel Vargas and Kerry McKenzie with Division of Arts and Humanities dean Cristina Della Coletta. (Photo by Farshid Bazmandegan)

The rankings are assigned from the Philosophical Gourmet Report, a longstanding, international reputational survey of philosophy departments that began offering rankings in 1996. The report, used as a guide by prospective Ph.D. students, ranks graduate programs primarily on the caliber of their faculty members, measuring both academic quality and reputation.

“These results plausibly correspond to significant steps forward our department has taken, including a series of recent and truly remarkable hires and several bold curricular innovations,” said department chair Jonathan Cohen, an expert in the philosophy of mind, language and perception. “While such rankings are certainly imperfect measures in many respects, it’s rewarding to see that the positive effects of our research and pedagogical missions have been recognized by the profession.”

The 2018 rankings were compiled from surveys conducted by more than 270 expert philosophers in academia, internationally. Cohen said this provided a broad-based look at all programs by leading philosophers with expertise in both the academic discipline of philosophy, and the requirements of running a strong graduate program.

In addition to the overall ranking, the report recognizes UC San Diego’s excellence in multiple specializations of study and research. The department is ranked in the top three programs for the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, the top six for the philosophy of physics, the top seven for the history of 17th century philosophy, the top nine for the philosophy of cognitive science, the top 11 for political philosophy and the top 15 for philosophy of race.

Strength in Kant comes from historians of philosophy Eric Watkins, Lucy Allais and Clinton Tolley. Allais, Tolley and Manuel Vargas, who works principally in moral psychology and Latin-American philosophy, are each mentioned specifically as key hires who likely helped boost the program’s rankings. Allais received the Henry E. Allison Endowed Chair in the History of Philosophy in 2014.

The other specialty area in which the department is ranked most highly is philosophy of physics, where the department’s strength primarily comes from faculty members Craig Callender, Kerry McKenzie, Charles Sebens and Nancy Cartwright. Cartwright received a MacArthur Fellowship in 1992.

“Philosophy of physics is a central area of philosophy, and one that requires impressive levels of sophistication in both the science and the philosophy. We are delighted to have our own experts recognized as comprising one of the strongest groups in this demanding subfield,” Cohen said.

Callender, a former department chair, is a founding co-director of the [Institute for Practical Ethics](#), a campus-wide initiative in the Division of Arts and Humanities that is becoming a leading voice on the ethics and social impact of cutting-edge science.

The [Department of Philosophy](#) resides in the [Division of Arts and Humanities](#) at UC San Diego. There are currently 43 graduate students in the department with four core areas of focus: philosophy of science, ethics, history of philosophy and philosophy of mind.

Recent graduates of the program represent some of the best up-and-coming philosophers, including Rhode Island College professor Amy Berg, Virginia Tech postdoctoral researcher Gil Hersch, Tulane University professor Dan Burnston and Rutgers University professor Craig Agule. Additional graduates include Theron Pummer, a 2013 graduate who is currently a professor at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, and Marta Halina, a lecturer at the University of Cambridge who received her Ph.D. in 2013.

“The department is thriving,” Cohen said. “We invite everyone to engage with us as we continue to evolve in exciting and innovative ways.”

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