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March 2, 2022

Philip T. Neisser, Interim President / Officer-In-Charge (neissept@potdams.edu)
Bette S. Bergeron, Provost (bergerbs@potdams.edu)
June F. O'Neill, Chair of SUNY Potsdam College Council (oneilljf@potdams.edu)
State University of New York at Potsdam
44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY 13676

Dear Officer Neisser, Provost Bergeron, and Chair O'Neill:

We write as chair of the board of officers and executive director of the American Philosophical Association, the largest scholarly society of philosophers in North America, representing more than 8,000 members. We urge you and all involved in making vital decisions about the future of SUNY Potsdam to preserve and support your philosophy program, rather than eliminating the major.

SUNY Potsdam describes itself as an institution that "prepares students to act as engaged global citizens and to lead lives enriched by critical thought, creativity and discovery," and one that is "committed to the liberal arts and sciences as an academic foundation for all students." It would be difficult to argue that SUNY Potsdam is fulfilling its mission or living up to its commitment to liberal arts education were it to eliminate its philosophy major.

Philosophy is an absolutely core liberal arts discipline, dedicated to critical thinking, clear communication, and ethical reasoning. More than perhaps any other discipline, philosophy prepares students to be engaged, well-rounded citizens and leaders with exactly the skills that SUNY Potsdam aims to cultivate. (More on the role of philosophy in higher ed: www.apaonline.org/role_of_phil)

Further, in terms of market value and equipping students with skills employers desire, philosophy is perhaps the best humanities major a student could choose. Philosophy teaches skills that are highly valued by employers and that are transferrable as the kinds of jobs available to workers change over time: critical thinking, creative problem solving, written and oral communication, and logical analysis. Renowned investor William H. Miller recently invested \$75 million in Johns Hopkins University's philosophy program, saying, "I attribute much of my business success to the analytical training and habits of mind that were developed when I was a graduate student [in philosophy] at Johns Hopkins." (See: <https://hub.jhu.edu/2018/01/16/bill-miller-hopkins-philosophy-gift/>)

A philosophy major or minor is a classic gateway to a career in law, and philosophy majors routinely outperform nearly all other majors on the LSAT, GRE, and GMAT. According to the Payscale.com 2015–2016 report, those with a BA in philosophy have the highest pay over time of all humanities majors, significantly outranking disciplines such as English literature and history. (See: <http://dailynous.com/2015/09/04/salaries-of-philosophy-majors-over-time/>) Philosophy majors' mid-career earning potential is ahead of majors in many fields outside the humanities, including biology, psychology, political science, and business. At a time when career outcomes are so important to students and parents, it is unwise to disinvest in a program that offers these career benefits.

We understand the desire of university administrators to make decisions based on numerical metrics such as majors or cost. But such metrics significantly undervalue what the philosophy program offers—it plays a pivotal role not only for majors and minors but also in core curricula and interdisciplinary programs. Courses such as Ethical Reasoning, Moral Issues in Mental Health, Philosophy of Law, Philosophy of Justice, Environmental Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Religion, and Business Ethics all serve students pursuing a variety of degrees and careers. It would be almost impossible for the philosophy program to maintain this breadth of high-quality offerings if the major were eliminated.

Moreover, the approach SUNY Potsdam has taken to its “Academic Affairs Realignment” is concerning. Though the philosophy program is said to be on “provisional status,” the timetable and conditions imposed do not give the program a real opportunity to respond or address any issues raised—rather, the plan seems designed to make elimination of the major inevitable. That the plan has been rolled out so quickly by the administration, with a short implementation timeline and minimal opportunities for programs to respond and improve, runs counter to established principles of faculty governance. Further, the plan does not appropriately consider metrics other than number of majors—which, as noted above, does not accurately capture all the program provides. In fact, given the department’s high faculty/student ratio, there is a strong case to be made that the philosophy program is a financial driver for the college, rather than a drain.

Finally, who better than SUNY Potsdam alumni to speak to the value of the philosophy major?

Taking a class in the Potsdam philosophy department quite literally changed my life. I went from knowing virtually nothing about philosophy to deciding to dedicate my life to the field (I am currently pursuing a PhD in philosophy at Penn). Despite being horrendously underfunded for years, the faculty have worked tirelessly to make a real and lasting impact on their students and the Potsdam community (an impact which cannot be measured merely with reference to the number of current majors). I have always been proud to call myself an alum from a public college which is dedicated to providing a full liberal arts education... A "liberal arts education" without philosophy is seriously impoverished, and the removal of the department would be, in my opinion, nothing short of an embarrassment for SUNY Potsdam. —Kate Nicole Hoffman

SUNY Potsdam's Philosophy Department provided a supportive environment to explore new ideas, question my values and beliefs, and develop skills in critical thinking and communication that have served me now through two advanced degrees and a successful career as an academic librarian. I've worked for colleges and universities of all sizes... few of the Philosophy programs at these schools could compete with the passion of Potsdam's faculty, the intimacy of upper-level classes and one-on-one discussions, or the camaraderie of fellow majors in Phi Sigma Tau and the Philosophy Forum. I'm heartbroken to see what the college administration has done to the department already and what they're trying to do now by eliminating the major. —Matthew Short

My philosophy major from SUNY Potsdam is the reason for my successful career in Software Engineering. While I had other more technical majors, and a subsequent master's degree, which may have opened more doors for me, the reason I was successful when I got in the door is due to the skills I learned from David Curry and my other professors in SUNY Potsdam's philosophy department. —Tom Bohan

For the sake of your mission, your students, and your community, we strongly urge you and all leaders at the SUNY Potsdam to preserve and support your philosophy program and its faculty.

Most sincerely,



Dominic McIver Lopes, Chair, Board of Officers



Amy E. Ferrer, Executive Director

cc: Professor Timothy G. Murphy, Chair of the Philosophy Department (murphytg@potsgdam.edu)