

March 15, 2022

Dear Officer-in-Charge Neisser,

The Department of Philosophy is writing to formally request that the current draft of the Academic Realignment Plan be revised so as to remove the recommendation for provisional status and threat of discontinuation of the Philosophy major, and to reverse the immediate dissolution of the Department of Philosophy. These elements of the current Academic Realignment Plan are

- (1) inconsistent with the stated characterization of the realignment plan as a reflection of the priorities for academic and institutional success described in the Fall 2021 realignment templates,
- (2) inconsistent with the characterization of the realignment plan as a response to the financial difficulties currently plaguing SUNY Potsdam, and
- (3) inconsistent with the liberal arts mission of the college.

Although a much more thorough accounting of our arguments can be found at sunypotsdamphilosophy.com, the problems with the current realignment draft's treatment of philosophy can be summarized as follows.

First, the plan calls for the elimination of the department and discontinuation of the major based exclusively on the current low number of majors in the program, ignoring literally every other consideration covered in the Fall 2021 template. It is not clear what metrics were used to reach the decisions reflected in the current draft, as few consistent patterns can be discerned by looking at which programs were spared provisional status and which were not. However, given the monumental effect the recommendations in the plan would have on the college's programming, a clear, and clearly applied standard for inclusion in the provisional status list is of utmost importance. If the intention of the Realignment Plan is to reflect the range of metrics described in those templates, the exemplary performance of the Philosophy department at essentially every metric except number of majors should preclude it from being dissolved as a department and put on provisional status as a program.

Relatedly, the exemplary performance of the Philosophy Department in terms of student/faculty ratio and the overwhelming degree to which department teaching supports Pathways and interdisciplinary studies programs undercuts any claim of financial need for the program's elimination. This fact is supported by the text of the realignment plan itself, which notes that "the program is further distinguished by the fact that a majority of its major courses also fulfill crucial functions within the General Education program, thus making the program cost-effective."

Finally, and we believe most importantly, the dissolution of the department and threat of deactivation of the major is straightforwardly inconsistent with the mission of the college, which states that "we are committed to the liberal arts and sciences as an academic foundation for all students." As long as the SUNY Potsdam mission statement remains unchanged, and as long as the college advertises itself to prospective students as a place where they will receive a comprehensive liberal arts education comparable

to that at other colleges, we have an obligation to support the disciplines that are constitutive of such an education.

As alumni, members of the local community, and members of the professional community of philosophy have become aware of the recommendations of the Academic Realignment Report, there has been a surge of dismay at the attitude toward the liberal arts in general and philosophy in particular that the plan reflects, and an outpouring of support for our program. We know that you have already received letters from the pre-eminent national professional organization of philosophers, the American Philosophical Association, as well as several other departments of philosophy, and from a number of concerned alumni. We also know that you are aware of the near 1500 signatures on our petition to you to reverse the recommendation of the report. It is important to understand that this response is a reaction to the degree to which the Academic Realignment Plan, as currently written, reflects a radical shift in the understanding of the purpose of our college and the value of our work here. In the absence of a coherent defense of such a radical reimagining of our institution, we ask that the upcoming revision of the Academic Realignment Plan fully reflects the liberal arts mission of the university, and the integral role that philosophy plays in that mission.

We conclude by reiterating our request that the next draft of the realignment plan reverse the recommendations for our program's deactivation and our department's dissolution. We are more than happy to provide more information to support the case made above. We are sensitive to the seriousness of the financial difficulties currently facing our college, but we believe that the realignment plan's current recommendations with regard to philosophy threaten to further erode that standing, rather than improve it. We are eager to work with our colleagues across faculty and administration to find solutions to the financial crisis which will preserve our college and enable us to continue to offer our students a complete and comprehensive liberal arts education.

Sincerely,

Tim Murphy
Chair and Associate Professor

David Curry
Professor

CC: June O'Neill, Chair of College Council
Bette Bergeron, Provost
Gretchen Galbraith, Dean of School of Arts and Sciences
Blair Madore, Chair of Faculty Senate