Department/Program Name: Philosophy

Date Submitted: September 2013

Academic Year this plan will be in effect: 2013-2020

Department/Program Mission Statement:

A philosophical education aims at several important goals:

1) To cultivate a student’s analytical, critical, interpretative and evaluative abilities,
2) To develop student’s skills in thinking, writing and speaking,
3) To introduce students to the history of the subject, thereby providing them with examples of creative approaches to perennial problems and aiding them in formulating their own solutions and values.

The achievement of these goals helps students become more competent and productive in the marketplace, as well as more reflective and informed in managing their work, relationships and life in general.

Elucidation:

The primary aim of a philosophical education is to cultivate student’s analytical, critical, interpretative and evaluative skills in thinking, writing and speaking. These skills are necessary for advancement and success in any career. Employers of all stripes seek and reward individuals with facility in problem solving and decision making, and who will bring a creative approach to job-related issues in the fluid and complex world of the 21st Century. A philosophical education also introduces students to the history of the subject, which provides examples of creative approaches to abstract problems, a willingness to consider and understand ideas other than their own, training in various techniques and methods for problem-solving, and introduces them to difficulties at the center of the most important issues of the 21st Century. Familiarity with the mind/body problem and issues in the philosophy of language, for example, have a fundamental place in recent research in Artificial Intelligence and computer technology in general; metaphysical, epistemological and ethical issues provide the foundation for any responsible discussion concerning environmental issues; a grounding in ethics is a necessary requirement for meaningful discussion of a whole host of issues central to our daily lives and welfare: euthanasia, capital punishment, abortion, and entitlement programs, to mention a few. A philosophical education can and should prepare the student not simply for abstract thought, but for success in the marketplace and for a more reflective and meaningful, and hence more fulfilling life.

Department Assessment Coordinator or Faculty Member Completing this Form:

Dr. David Curry
**Intended Student Learning Outcome #1**

To cultivate a student’s analytical, critical, interpretative and evaluative abilities

**Connection to Univ/Dept Mission**

Potsdam Graduate:

“Skills of a Potsdam Graduate:

* The ability to judge, appraise and evaluate, in matters ethical, aesthetic, empirical and logical,
* The ability to reason analytically, formally, symbolically and quantitatively,
* The ability to solve problems by creative synthesis of knowledge”

Department Mission:

“The primary aim of a philosophical education is to cultivate student’s analytical, critical, interpretative and evaluative skills in thinking, writing and speaking.”

- *Gen Ed Component – FC, PI*

**Measurable Criteria and Assessment Method(s)**

**Direct Assessment #1: Exit Exam:**

During the final semester of the student’s college career he or she will be asked to complete a brief exam of analytical ability. The exam is meant to measure the following skills:

a) The ability to understand the logical structure of an argument  
b) the ability to evaluate the content of an argument’s premises and the strength of its inferences, and  
c) the ability to express in writing the student’s understanding and evaluation of an argument  
(a & b evaluate learning objective #1)

The exam will consist of two passages from either classical philosophical works or from the contemporary media chosen by the Departmental Assessment Committee. Students will be asked to identify and evaluate the main argument of the passage. (sample included below)

**Criteria:**

1) Did the writer understand and successfully relate the argumentative structure of the passage?
2) Did the writer reflect accurately any outside material to which she referred?
3) Did the writer exhibit originality of thought and exercise her critical skills?
4) Did the writer construct clear, grammatically correct paragraphs?
5) Did the writer make sure that she did not include needless and irrelevant information?
6) Did the writer demonstrate an awareness of viewpoints contrary to that expressed in the passage?
7) Did the writer use examples, arguments and provide evidence for her position?

**Direct Assessment #2: Portfolio Evaluation**

Students enrolled in PHIL 475, Senior Seminar, will complete both speaking assignments (presentation of course material) and a significant writing assignment, as follows:

Each participant will be responsible for presenting the course material at least twice over the course of the semester. A minimum of 40% of the final grade will be based on the quality and content of these class presentations.

The remaining ~60% of the final grade will be based on assignments as determined by the individual instructor (including, but not limited to, at least one extensive paper).

The model for class presentations will be presentation at a professional conference in philosophy. The student will be responsible not just for presenting a certain body of material, but for having something to say about that material, and for reaching a level of understanding such that they can field questions from the seminar leader and other participants. The paper presented at the end of the semester, based on one or more of the oral presentations, will be suitable for (and will be encouraged to be) submitted to undergraduate conferences and/or journals.

**Criteria:**
1) Did the writer address all of the significant portions of the assigned material in their oral and written work?
2) Did the writer reflect accurately any outside material to which she referred?
3) Did the writer exhibit originality of thought and exercise her critical skills?
4) Did the writer construct clear, grammatically correct paragraphs?
5) Did the writer make sure that she did not include needless and irrelevant information?
6) Did the writer demonstrate an awareness of viewpoints contrary to her own?
7) Does the essay have adequate aesthetic quality (e.g., presence of acceptable literary style)
8) Did the writer use examples, arguments and provide evidence for her position?

**Indirect Assessment #1: Exit Survey**

During the final semester of their college career students are asked to complete a survey about the major program. The survey is a self-report by students asking for their assessment of how well the major delivered on the goals set out in this document. The survey provides an opportunity for the student to reflect upon their undergraduate training in philosophy. A copy of the survey is attached to this document.
**Intended Student Learning Outcome #2**

To develop student’s skills in thinking, writing and speaking

**Connection to University/Dept Mission/The Potsdam Graduate**

Potsdam Graduate:

The ability to reason analytically, formally, symbolically and quantitatively,
The ability to organize thought and communicate in written and oral form,

Department Mission:

“The primary aim of a philosophical education is to cultivate student’s analytical, critical, interpretative and evaluative skills in thinking, writing and speaking.”

*Gen Ed Component – FC, FW, FS, PI, WI, SI*

**Measurable Criteria and Assessment Method(s)**

Same sources as for learning outcome #1
Intended Student Learning Outcome #3

To introduce student to the history of the subject, thereby providing them with examples of creative approaches to perennial problems and aiding them in formulating their own solutions and values.

Connection to University/Dept Mission/The Potsdam Graduate

Potsdam Graduate:

The ability to solve problems by creative synthesis of knowledge,
A knowledge of the heritage of Western civilization, including major artistic, scientific, technological, philosophical and social developments,
A knowledge of the forms and currents in twentieth century arts and philosophy,
A knowledge of how language permits communication, shapes thought and changes through time.

Department Mission:

A philosophical education introduces students to the history of the subject, which provides examples of creative approaches to abstract problems, a willingness to consider and understand ideas other than their own, training in various techniques and methods for problem-solving, and introduces them to difficulties at the center of the most important issues of the 21st Century. Familiarity with the mind/body problem and issues in the philosophy of language, for example, have a fundamental place in recent research in Artificial Intelligence and computer technology in general; metaphysical, epistemological and ethical issues provide the foundation for any responsible discussion concerning environmental issues; a grounding in ethics is a necessary requirement for meaningful discussion of a whole host of issues central to our daily lives and welfare: euthanasia, capital punishment, abortion, and entitlement programs, to mention a few.

- Gen Ed Component – FC, PI, WC

Measurable Criteria and Assessment Method(s)

Same sources as for learning outcome #1
Appendix 1: Assessment Exams from 2010-11 and 2011-12

Philosophy Department Assessment Examination
Spring 2011

Instructions: Please evaluate the following passages. In each case try to say exactly what the author is attempting to establish and what you take his arguments or reasoning to be. Give the logical sequence of the author’s argument and your own critical assessment of it.

Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*

Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person; this nobody has a right to but himself. The labor of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes from out of the state that nature has provided and left it in, he has mixed his labor with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes his own property. It being by him removed from the common state nature has placed it in, it has by this labor something annexed to it that excluded the common right of other men. For this labor being the unquestionable property of the laborer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough and as good left in common for others.

Plato, *Phaedo, 74a5ff*

We say that there is something which is equal. I do not mean a stick equal to a stick or a stone to a stone, or anything of that kind, but something else beyond all these, the Equal itself. Shall we say that this exists or not? Indeed, we shall, by Zeus, said Simmias, most definitely.

And do we know what this is? Certainly

Whence have we acquired the knowledge of it? Is it not from the things we mentioned just now, from seeing sticks and stones or some other things that are equal we come to think of that other which is different from them? Or does it seem to you to be different? Look at it also this way: do not equal sticks and stones sometimes, while remaining the same, appear to one to be equal and to another to be unequal? Certainly they do

But what of the equals themselves? Have they ever appeared unequal to you, or Equality to be Inequality?

Never, Socrates.

These equal things and the Equal itself are therefore not the same?

I do not think they are the same at all, Socrates.
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book ii, Ch 5, 1105b20-1106a15

Next we must consider what virtue is. Since things that are found in the soul are of three kinds--passions, faculties, and states of character--virtue must be one of these. By passions I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain; by faculties the things in virtue of which we are said to be capable of feeling these, e.g. of becoming angry or being pained or feeling pity; by states of character the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions, e.g. with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it moderately; and similarly with reference to the other passions.

Now neither the virtues nor the vices are passions, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on the ground of our virtues and our vices, and because we are neither praised nor blamed for our passions (for the man who feels fear or anger is not praised, nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed, but the man who feels it in a certain way), but for our virtues and our vices we are praised or blamed.

Again, we feel anger and fear without choice, but the virtues are modes of choice or involve choice. Further, in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the virtues and the vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way.

For these reasons also they are not faculties; for we are neither called good nor bad, nor praised nor blamed, for the simple capacity of feeling the passions; again, we have the faculties by nature, but we are not made good or bad by nature; we have spoken of this before.

If, then, the virtues are neither passions nor faculties, all that remains is that they should be states of character.

Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, VII, Pt. 1

It is universally allowed, that nothing exists without a cause of its existence, and that chance, when strictly examined, is a mere negative word, and means not any real power, which has any where, a being in nature. But, it is pretended, that some causes are necessary, some not necessary. Here then is the advantage of definitions. Let any one define a cause, without comprehending, as a part of the definition, a necessary connexion with its effect; and let him show distinctly the origin of the idea, expressed by the definition; and I shall readily give up the whole controversy. But if the foregoing
explication of the matter be received, this must be absolutely impracticable. Had not objects a regular conjunction with each other, we should never have entertained any notion of cause and effect; and this regular conjunction produces that inference of the understanding, which is the only connexion, that we can have any comprehension of. Whoever attempts a definition of cause, exclusive of these circumstances, will be obliged, either to employ unintelligible terms or such as are synonymous to the term, which he endeavours to define. And if the definition above mentioned be admitted; liberty, when opposed to necessity, not to constraint, is the same thing with chance, which is universally allowed to have no existence.

Appendix 2 – Assessment Survey

Philosophy Department Assessment Survey

Answer the following on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means ‘Most Agree’ and 5 means ‘Least Agree’. Circle your response.

1) Do you believe that you are adequately prepared to identify and evaluate the main arguments of a philosophical essay which you have not previously confronted?

1 2 3 4 5

2) Do you believe that you are adequately prepared to compose an acceptable persuasive essay?

1 2 3 4 5

3) Do you believe that you have a knowledge of some of the principal texts and currents in both the history of Western Philosophy and philosophy in the 20th century?

1 2 3 4 5

4) Do you believe that your philosophical education has helped to nurture your ability to form reasoned discriminations and judgements?

1 2 3 4 5

Please briefly respond to the following (feel free to continue on the back or on another page if space is too limited):

5) In what areas of philosophy, if any, do you believe you have been adequately versed? In what areas, if any, do you believe you have been inadequately versed?
6) Comment (pro or con) on the effectiveness of the exams, papers, discussions, classes, presentations and other testing mechanisms used by the philosophy faculty. What changes, if any, do you recommend?

7) Comment (pro or con) on the effectiveness of the lectures, discussions, group work and other instruction methods used by the philosophy faculty. What changes, if any, do you recommend?

8) Comment on the course offerings in the philosophy department. Which courses, if any, should be added or taught more often? Which current courses, if any, should be eliminated?

9) Comment on the quality of the advising you received as a major. What changes, if any, do you recommend?
10) Comment on the extracurricular and other out-of-classroom support or resources the department has provided for majors, including availability and approachability of the faculty. Is such support adequate? How might it be strengthened?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATING IN THIS ASSESSMENT SURVEY!