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# PHILOSOPHY NEWSLETTER

A Newsletter Published by the Philosophy Department of the State University of New York at Potsdam

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## Greetings from the Chair

By David C.K. Curry

A year after Dr. Di Giovanna's retirement the department continues to face challenges and to greet opportunities.

The college continues to struggle with a serious fiscal crisis which appears to keep deepening. The crisis is, in large part, the result of declining enrollments – we are down 20% from 10 years ago, due in large part to the changing demographics in NY.

The department, then, has little hope of relief from its growing staffing difficulties. In addition to the retirement and non-replacement of Dr. Di Giovanna, the upper administration decided to not renew Prof. Mark Munroe's contract. Professor Munroe had taught for us successfully for fourteen years. This leaves the department with three full-time tenured faculty, Dr. Curry, Dr. Murphy and Dr. Tartaglia, and no adjunct support.

That all said, through some tortuous negotiations, the department did receive permission to hire a one year visiting lecturer. Hence, we are pleased to welcome Dr. Antonio Dos Santos to the department. Dr. Dos Santos will replace Prof. Munroe as well as cover for Dr. Curry who has agreed to serve as Interim Director of the newly adopted Potsdam Pathways Core Curriculum program, which will replace the current General Education program. Dr. Dos Santos will be teaching a daunting five courses per semester for the department.

Dr. Dos Santos received his doctorate from McMaster University in Toronto in September of 2018. Dr. Dos Santos is an ethicist, whose work straddles applied and theoretical issues. His presence helps to mitigate the lack of an ethicist in the department, albeit only for a year. His dissertation, *Moral Capacities: Psychopaths and Moral Responsibility*, argues that, contrary to standard accounts, the moral capacities of psychopaths grant plentiful room for attributions of moral responsibility. An abstract of his dissertation is included later in this newsletter.

Dr. Murphy will be taking a well-deserved sabbatical in the spring of 2020. For his sabbatical research project Dr. Murphy plans to delve deeply into the nature of the modal concepts: the concepts of necessity, possibility and impossibility. These concepts play a central role in a large number of positions in the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of science, metaphysics, and epistemology. They are also related to issues Dr. Murphy has been working on for years in

the philosophy of mathematics. Given the ubiquitous nature of modal concepts, whatever research Dr. Murphy does will certainly inform his teaching (all of the above subject areas are ones that Dr. Murphy has primary responsibility for). Sabbaticals offer tangible benefits for our students; for the department, in expanding Tim's expertise in these areas; for the college, and for Dr. Murphy himself - philosophical rejuvenation, and an opportunity to regroup and refresh his teaching. Dr. Murphy's absence will further deplete our already thin offerings, but we will be able to hire an adjunct to cover two of his four courses, albeit lower division ones.

The department still lacks a permanent faculty member with expertise in ethics, social and political philosophy, continental philosophy, non-western philosophy, feminism, and philosophy of race, points raised quite bluntly in our external reviewer's report two years ago. With the retirement of Dr. Di Giovanna we have lost our expertise in Aesthetics and Philosophy of Language as well. Regardless of this state of affairs, we remain committed to delivering the best programs we can given our limited resources.

We are very pleased to announce that the department awarded the first Daniel Gross Scholarship in Philosophy to Jake Collins, a senior philosophy major, last spring. We continue to welcome gifts in Dan's memory to help the scholarship fund grow and flourish. We know that our students find themselves more and more in need of financial assistance to fund their college experience. Your contribution can make a real difference in the life of one of our deserving students. The Daniel Gross Philosophy Scholarship will be awarded annually to a declared philosophy major with financial need.

The department graduated only three majors this last May; Kaitlyn Wilson, Israel Payero, and Michael Crotty. Jake Collins plans to graduate in December. Kaitlyn graduated with both a philosophy major and a psychology major. She will be pursuing a MSW degree, and then work in the mental health counseling field. Israel completed his philosophy major as well as a politics major. He will take some time off before considering further study of either political philosophy or political theory. Michael graduated with a philosophy major and a biology minor. Michael will be looking for employment while he decides whether or not to pursue graduate work. Our major numbers continue to be sparse, a reflection of the sparsity of our faculty and hence of our offerings. Those fewer majors we do have, however, continue to do us proud.



Michael Crotty – Graduation 2019

Philosophy Forum had another overactive year. A listing of events is included later in this newsletter. Forum once again sponsored weekly activities ranging from social gatherings and movie discussions to presentations of papers by students, faculty, and visiting professors, and trips to undergraduate philosophy conferences. Unfortunately, we failed to get a second annual Philosophy in the Valley Conference up and running due to a lack of submissions. While a couple of our students submitted papers, we didn't get enough external submissions to make sponsoring the conference worthwhile. We hope to cast our net a bit wider and try again this year.

Forum again sponsored a trip to the undergraduate philosophy conference at SUNY Oneonta at which two of our students presented papers. Jake Collins presented "Qualia and the Chinese Room" and Jeremy Walts presented "Russell on Causation". These papers were presented to Forum in a dry run prior to being delivered at the Oneonta conference.

Notable guest speakers this year included Matthew Pietropaoli, ABD in philosophy at Catholic University, "What an Organism is and Why it Matters: Reflections on Hans Jonas's Philosophy of Life"; Dr. Rachel Fedock, Honors Faculty Fellow at Barrett Honors College, Arizona State University, "Dissolving the Illusion of the Love and Justice Dichotomy"; Dr. Matt Chick, Politics, "Why should we vote?"; Dr. Steven Stannish, History, "Shadows of Heresy: The Reign of the Pharaoh Akhenaten and Its Aftermath."; NEH Distinguished Visiting Scholar, Dr. Boris Lanin, "Zamyatin and Orwell: Founding Fathers of Modern Russian Anti-Utopian Writing"; Dr. Melissa Dolese, Psychology, "Aesthetics Approaches Inform What Art Is, What it Does, and What We Like"; Dr. Matt LaVine, Environmental Studies, "Starting Points in Philosophy and Starting Points in the Analytic Tradition" and "What are races? Why does it matter?"; Dr. Matt Chick, Visiting Assistant Professor, Politics, "The Dangers of Testimony and Why We Should Listen Anyway"; Mackay lecture, SLU: Dr. Lisa Guenther, Professor of Philosophy, Queen's University, "No Prisoner's on Stolen Land: Abolition and Decolonization as

Interconnected Struggles"; Dr. Laura Rediehs, Associate Professor of Philosophy, SLU, "Integrating Science and Religion"; Dr. Jeffery Maynes, Associate Professor of Philosophy, SLU, "What is linguistics all about?"; Dr. Richard Dub, philosophy researcher at the Swiss National Science Foundation, "When Things Don't Feel Real", and Dr. Richard Lauer, Visiting Asst. Professor of Philosophy, SLU, "Social Ontology and Empirical Success in Social Science: Exploratory and Instrumental Approaches".

Forum is always seeking to broaden our participant's perspectives, and that is aided by collaborations with other departments and their faculty on campus. This past year was notable for the number of such collaborations. For example, we piggybacked onto a Geology Department and Geology Club public lecture by Dr. Richard Alley, Evan Pugh University Professor of Geosciences at Pennsylvania State University, entitled "Finding the Good News on Energy and Environment". The following week we followed up by inviting some local geologists and biologists to more deeply explore some of the issues Dr. Alley raised in his talk. Dr. Lauer, SLU Philosophy, Drs. Rygel and Quinton, Potsdam Geology, and Dr. Plague, Potsdam Biology all volunteered to lend their expertise to our lively discussion of climate science. Dr. Plague also volunteered to attend a showing of the PBS special entitled "Darwin's Dangerous Idea" which we aired for Forum and for a course on Darwin Dr. Curry was teaching last fall. His perspective was invaluable. Drs. Chick and McGuire, Potsdam Politics, invited us to participate in some pre-election discussions, and we also piggybacked onto both the NEH Distinguished Visiting Professor's public lectures as well as the annual Mackay lecture at SLU for a talk by Dr. Lisa Guenther, Professor of Philosophy at Queen's University.

A holiday gathering at Dr. Murphy's house and our annual spring picnic at Dr. Curry's continued valuable traditions.

Dr. Curry continued his work with the General Education Steering Committee throughout last year. That work culminated in a May vote of the Faculty Senate which endorsed the proposed Potsdam Pathways Core Curriculum by a 72% margin. Dr. Curry volunteered to serve as the Interim Director of the Pathways program for a year to get things up and running. All incoming students in the fall of 2020 will be under the exciting new Pathways Curriculum. Perhaps the highlight of the new program are three small first year seminars taught by our best and brightest faculty on subjects they are deeply engaged with. These Ways of Beginning seminars impart the skills necessary for success in college, career and life - critical thinking, reading and writing, and speaking skills - delivered through content students choose based on their interests. As an example, Dr. Murphy is piloting one of the critical thinking seminars this semester. Entitled "Everyday Ethics" the course develops critical thinking skills by examining arguments pro and con about everyday ethical dilemmas, such as if it ok to not tip, or if it is ok to enter the 15 maximum item check-out line with 16 items. Dr. Murphy is using an as yet unpublished manuscript by our former colleague Dr. Brian Huss for the ethics source material.

Dr. Murphy's paper, "An Encoding Approach to Ante Rem Structuralism", was published in the journal *Synthese* in March. *Synthese* is a very selective journal, accepting only 10% of submissions. Dr. Murphy engaged in extensive service work for the department, the school of arts and sciences and the

college. As noted, Dr. Murphy is looking forward to a well-deserved sabbatical in the spring.

Drs Di Giovanna taught medieval philosophy for us in the fall of 2018 and is currently teaching Aesthetics for us. Dr. Di Giovanna will continue to teach a course or two each fall. His contributions to the college were recognized over the summer with an Honorary Alumni Award presented by the college Alumni Association.

Dr. Tartaglia continues his research in epistemology, focusing recently on the philosophy of Donald Davidson.

The department was once again humbled by the numerous generous contributions to the department's Foundation account, which we rely upon more and more as State dollars dry up. Our departmental budget barely covers basic operating costs like copying and supplies. Thus, Foundation dollars funded by generous gifts from friends and alumni become all the more important. Foundation dollars are used to support our guest speaker program, student travel to present at and attend philosophy conferences, to help fund faculty travel to present their work at conferences, to help fund student awards and generally to support the intellectual life of the department (see below).

I am hopeful these brief remarks give you some idea of the status of the department. These are trying times for higher education, and particularly for the liberal arts and humanities. We here at Potsdam strive to preserve the liberal arts and to sing their praises. As so many of you know first hand, rather than being a career impediment, studying philosophy is a career enhancer and, more importantly, a life enhancer. Sending this message is a large part of why the faculty remains committed to providing a first rate, challenging and engaging experience for our students, majors and non-majors alike.

We would love to see you if you find yourself in the North Country. Feel free to contact us at any time!



Katie Wilson grappling with the graduation wind

## Philosophers' Corner

### A Classic Puzzle:

A king wants his daughter to marry the smartest of 3 extremely intelligent young princes, and so the king's wise men devised an intelligence test.

The princes are gathered into a room and seated, facing one another, and are shown 2 black hats and 3 white hats. They are blindfolded, and 1 hat is placed on each of their heads, with the remaining hats hidden in a different room.

The king tells them that the first prince to deduce the color of his hat without removing it or looking at it will marry the princess. A wrong guess will mean death. The blindfolds are then removed.

You are one of the princes. You see 2 white hats on the other prince's heads. After some time you realize that the other princes are unable to deduce the color of their hat, or are unwilling to guess. What color is your hat?

Note: You know that your competitors are very intelligent and want nothing more than to marry the princess. You also know that the king is a man of his word, and he has said that the test is a fair test of intelligence and bravery.

E-mail your responses to [currydc@potsdam.edu](mailto:currydc@potsdam.edu) and we will summarize the results and report out in the next newsletter. Have fun!

### Solution to Rolling the Die

A young boy sits quietly on a stoop rolling a single die over and over. Each time the die stops rolling, he picks it up, examines it, and whispers something to himself.

Each time he rolls a one, he whispers, "15". Each time he gets a six, he whispers, "20."

The boy has just rolled a three. What number will he whisper this time?

**Solution:** The boy is summing up all the numbers which are showing on the die. Thus, if the die reads '3', that means that the '4' is face down – then,  $1 + 2 + 3 + 5 + 6$  (the numbers showing) = 17

## News from Alums

Jacob Feldman, '06, writes:

"You'll be glad to know that philosophy is still a big part of my life and a major component of my reading fodder. A favorite that comes to mind that I discovered a while back and have read a few times now is *The Embers and The Stars* by Erazim Kohak. It's an interesting crossroads between the transcendentalist focus on nature and phenomenology. It's at times poetic but definitely philosophically rigorous. Might be something that's up your alley.

I moved back to Saratoga almost 5 years ago after ~6 years in California. I'm managing an independent health food store

and still trying to cook up a way to make my master's in environmental sustainability worth the investment. You'd think in this... climate that wouldn't be such a struggle! Things are generally good though. I make weird art and try to get out in the woods as much as I can. In two weeks I'll be hiking the 135 mile Northville-Placid trail."

Geoff Mackey, '00, writes:

"On May 26, 2019, I was ordained to the priesthood in the Byzantine Catholic Church. I continue to work at the Anglican seminary, but also serve in two local parishes. Which turns out to be way too much work!

Anyway - this past summer I added Myanmar & Singapore to the places I have now led student trips. But I'll be going back to Egypt next summer again.

Please give my regards to those on the faculty who would remember me. I don't know when we might be able to make a trip back to northern New York, but I am grateful for all that Potsdam did for me!"



Victoria Hocking, Nicholas Flint, Brandon Coombs (2018 inductee), Jeremy Walts, Jake Collins, Desiree Deon, Chukwuzitere Okwaraji, and Katie Wilson (2018 inductee).

### Thanks to All Alumni and non-Alumni Contributors!

The Philosophy faculty would like to publicly express our sincere gratitude to the many former students who have so generously donated amounts ranging from \$25 to \$3000 over the past years to the SUNY Potsdam Philosophy Department Foundation Account. In particular, we want to acknowledge the generous gifts this year from Dr. John Cross, Mr. Timothy Kemp, Mr. Ben Guthrie, and Dr. Curry. In addition, James and Susan Gross, Gregory McCann and Allison Allen contributed to the Daniel Gross Scholarship Fund. Your support overwhelms us and greatly contributes to our efforts. Thank you all.

This past year your generous gifts were used to support student travel to conferences, student participation in intimate dinners with guest speakers, and bringing those guest speakers to campus to interact with our students, as well as cakes and candles for our departmental awards ceremony. These are all things which help build the departmental community and which could not be supported without your help.

Don't forget to tell us all of your news by submitting the Report of Alumni Form information to [currydc@potdam.edu](mailto:currydc@potdam.edu). Let us know where you are, what you are doing, and anything particularly memorable about your time here at Potsdam with the department and its faculty.

### Philosophy Forum Activities 2018-19

#### Fall 2018

**September 6 - Planning meeting**

**September 13 – Movie viewing and discussion: Bergman's "Wild Strawberries"**

**September 20 – Mixer**

**September 27 – Guest Speaker: Matthew Pietropaoli, ABD in philosophy at Catholic University, "What an Organism is and Why it Matters: Reflections on Hans Jonas's Philosophy of Life."**

**October 4 – Film and Discussion: "Darwin's Dangerous Idea" in conjunction w/ Curry's Darwin classes and with the help of Dr. Gordon Plague of the Biology Dept.**

**October 11 – Guest Speaker - Dr. Rachel Fedock, Honors Faculty Fellow at Barrett Honors College, Arizona State University, "Dissolving the Illusion of the Love and Justice Dichotomy".**

**October 18th - Geology Department and Geology Club public lecture: Dr. Richard Alley, Evan Pugh University Professor of Geosciences at Pennsylvania State University, "Finding the Good News on Energy and Environment"**

**October 24 – A Major Affair**

**October 25 – Follow Up Panel on Climate Change w/ guests, Dr. Lauer, SLU Philosophy; Drs. Rygel and Quinton, Geology and Dr. Plague, Biology.**

**October 30 - Prof. Chick and Prof. McGuire, Politics, Preparations for and discussion of midterms 2018**

**November 1 – Informal Discussion led by Dr. Matt Chick, Politics, "Why should we vote?"**

**November 8 – Guest Speaker: Classical Studies collaboration: Dr. Steven Stannish, History, "Shadows of Heresy: The Reign of the Pharaoh Akhenaten and Its Aftermath."**

November 15 - NEH Distinguished Visiting Scholar, Dr. Boris Lanin's public lecture, "Zamyatin and Orwell: Founding Fathers of Modern Russian Anti-Utopian Writing".

November 29 - Dr. Melissa Dolese, Psychology, "Aesthetics Approaches Inform What Art Is, What it Does, and What We Like".

December 6 – Guest Lecture: Dr. Matt LaVine, Environmental Studies, "Starting Points in Philosophy and Starting Points in the Analytic Tradition"

December 9 – Department Holiday Gathering, Dr. Murphy's home

## Spring 2019

January 31 - Planning Meeting

February 7 – Movie and Discussion: "Sorry to Bother You"

February 14 – Mixer

February 21 – Guest Speaker: Dr. LaVine, Environmental Studies, "What are races? Why does it matter?"

February 28 – Guest Speaker: Dr. Matt Chick, Visiting Assistant Professor, Politics, "The Dangers of Testimony and Why We Should Listen Anyway"

March 7 - Mackay lecture, SLU: Dr. Lisa Guenther, Professor of Philosophy, Queen's University, "No Prisoner's on Stolen Land: Abolition and Decolonization as Interconnected Struggles"

March 21 - Dr. Laura Rediehs, Associate Professor of Philosophy, SLU, "Integrating Science and Religion"

March 28 - Dr. Jeffery Maynes, Associate Professor of Philosophy, SLU, "What is linguistics all about?"

April 4 – Student Presentations: Jake Collins, "Qualia and the Chinese Room" and Jeremy Walts "Russell on Causation"

April 12-13 – Oneonta: 7 Students attended, three faculty. Two presenters, Jake Collins and Jeremy Walts

April 25 – Guest Speaker: Dr. Richard Dub, philosophy researcher at the Swiss National Science Foundation, "When Things Don't Feel Real"

May 2 - Phi Sigma Tau Initiation Ceremony, the International Honors Society for Philosophy

May 9 – Guest Speaker: Dr. Richard Lauer, Visiting Asst. Professor of Philosophy, SLU, "Social Ontology and Empirical Success in Social Science: Exploratory and Instrumental Approaches"

May 17 – Annual Department Spring Picnic

## Philosophy Graduates May 2018

### Philosophy Majors

Michael Crotty (and Biology Minor)

Israel Payero (and Politics Major)

Katelyn Wilson (and Psychology Major)

Jake Collins (and Environmental Studies Major – scheduled to graduate December 2019)

## Philosophy Department Student Awards for the Academic Year 2018-19

### *James Berriman Scholarship in Philosophy*

Camille (Loren) Dalley

Desiree Deon

### *Daniel Gross Memorial Scholarship in Philosophy*

Jake Collins

### *Canfield Scholarship*

Brandon Coombs

### *2018 Excellence in Philosophy Award*

Katelyn Wilson

### *Departmental Scholar*

Brandon Coombs



Jake Collins, Brandon Coombs, Camille (Loren) Dalley, Desiree Deon, Katelyn Wilson

### *Phi Sigma Tau Initiates*

Jake Collins

Desiree Deon

Nicolas Flint

Victoria Hocking

Chukwuzitere Okwaraji

Jeremy Walts



Let them eat cake!

### An Abstract of Dr. Antonio Dos Santos' Dissertation

Psychopaths have traditionally been excluded from conversations about morality and have regularly been used as a paradigm case for why emotions or emotional knowledge are necessary for the acquisition of moral knowledge. Psychopaths possess an affective deficit that results in an almost total lack of empathy. Emotionists argue that emotions (specifically empathy) are central to moral understanding and since psychopaths possess this affective deficit, they are unable to attain moral knowledge, which is a necessary capacity for moral responsibility. Given recent neurological findings regarding psychopaths, I argue that Emotionists cannot use the psychopath as an example for their argument that emotions are necessary for moral knowledge. The upshot of my analysis is a rethinking of what it means to possess the right kind of emotional knowledge for moral responsibility. I argue that despite psychopaths' affective disorder, they do possess three of the capacities (via cognitive mechanisms) considered by many to be necessary for moral responsibility: the capacity to acquire moral knowledge, the capacity to be reason responsive to moral demands, and the capacity to control one's actions in light of moral demands and reasons. Cognitive mechanisms play a larger part in moral responsibility than normally thought. My work also requires a rethinking of the moral capabilities of psychopaths. Given that their cognitive capacities are more or less intact, the scope of their moral knowledge is wider than traditionally believed.

### Scholarship Drive in Memory of Daniel Gross '13

We made remarkable progress towards setting up a scholarship in memory of Daniel Gross '13. Over the course of the year we received \$4650 in donations to the fund. This has encouraged us to leave the fund open and shoot for a full endowment of \$20,000, which would make the scholarship self-sustaining. According to Foundation rules, we have a few years to raise that sum.

As I wrote last year, Dan was a very bright light—a kind soul who positively affected everyone he interacted with. Over his time at Potsdam, Dan grew into a confident critical thinker committed to political and social change. Our goal is to honor Dan's memory with a scholarship devoted to offering some financial support for others following in his footsteps.

Donations of any amount to the scholarship fund can be sent here: <https://secure.potsdam.edu/giving>. Please be sure to indicate that the monies are in memory of Daniel Gross. Many companies will provide matching funds if you contribute, doubling the effect of your generosity. Let's see what we can do to honor the memory of an exceptional student, friend and human being.

### Suggestions????

Is there anything you would like to see in the next Newsletter? Send any suggestions, critiques, or queries to Dr. Curry at [currydc@potsdam.edu](mailto:currydc@potsdam.edu)



Dr. Di Giovanna enjoying the Phi Sigma Tau Induction Ceremony

### Philosophy Students Need Your Help!

Please consider supporting our students' philosophical activities by making a contribution to the SUNY Philosophy Department Foundation Account. You can send a check with a note stating that your donation is for the Philosophy Department to SUNY Potsdam College Advancement Office, Raymond Hall 616, SUNY Potsdam, 44 Pierrepoint Avenue, Potsdam, NY 13676-2294, or complete the College Foundation's **Online Giving Form** on the SUNY Potsdam website at <https://secure.potsdam.edu/giving>. You may even indicate the specific purpose your gift is to serve; for example, students' undergraduate conference trip expenses, book purchases, or small scholarships. No amount is too small and all contributions will be greatly appreciated by our students and professors.

## Philosophy Department Faculty

### David C. K. Curry

**Chair and Professor:** History of Philosophy, Existentialism  
Office: Morey Hall 204  
Office Phone: (315) 267-2021  
Email: [currydc@potsgdam.edu](mailto:currydc@potsgdam.edu)

### Joseph J. Di Giovanna

**Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus:** Philosophy of Language, Aesthetics  
Office: Morey Hall 205  
Office Phone: (315) 267-2022  
Email: [digiovji@potsgdam.edu](mailto:digiovji@potsgdam.edu)

### Antonio Dos Santos

**Visiting Lecturer in Philosophy:** Applied & Theoretical Ethics  
Office: MacVicar 220  
Phone: (315) 267- 2213  
Email: [dossanas@potsgdam.edu](mailto:dossanas@potsgdam.edu)

### Judith A. Little

**Professor Emeritus:** Theoretical & Applied Ethics, Social & Political Philosophy  
Email: [littleja@potsgdam.edu](mailto:littleja@potsgdam.edu)

### Helen Bush

**Departmental Secretary**  
Office: MacVicar Hall 223  
Phone: (315) 267-2064  
Email: [bushhd@potsgdam.edu](mailto:bushhd@potsgdam.edu)

### Timothy Murphy

**Associate Professor:** Philosophy of Mathematics, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Philosophy of Science  
Office: Morey Hall 207  
Office Phone: (315) 267-3342  
Email: [murphytg@potsgdam.edu](mailto:murphytg@potsgdam.edu)

### Galen K. Pletcher

**Professor Emeritus, Emeritus Dean of Arts and Sciences:** Philosophy of Religion  
Email: [pletchgk@potsgdam.edu](mailto:pletchgk@potsgdam.edu)

### Philip Tartaglia

**Professor:** Logic, Philosophy of Language, Ethics  
Office: Morey Hall 203  
Office Phone: (315) 267-2022  
Email: [tartagpo@potsgdam.edu](mailto:tartagpo@potsgdam.edu)



Victoria Hocking, Nicholas Flint, Jeremy Walts, Jake Collins, Desiree Deon, and Chukwuzitere Okwaraji

REPORT OF ALUMNI

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR GRADUATED \_\_\_\_\_

DEGREE(S) EARNED \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYMENT \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this form and return to Dr. David C. K. Curry, SUNY Potsdam, 44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY 13676; or fax to 315/267-2656; or e-mail to [currydc@potsdam.edu](mailto:currydc@potsdam.edu)  
Thanks!



630073  
Department of Philosophy  
SUNY College at Potsdam  
44 Pierrepont Avenue  
Potsdam, NY 13676-2294

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US POSTAGE PAID  
POTSDAM, NY  
PERMIT NO. 12