

Department of Philosophy Strategic Plan

2/13/09 – Final Draft

Section 1: Department Description

1.1.1 Mission, vision and goals

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Department of Philosophy at Gustavus Adolphus College views its mission as fourfold:

A quality major. To offer a quality major that offers students a relatively comprehensive understanding of the major philosophical traditions, ideas and arguments that have influenced the development of Western society. It provides students with the skills for critically analyzing these traditions, and to use them to inform their own lives.

Interdisciplinary Programs. To participate in the various interdisciplinary programs on campus such as Environmental Studies, Peace Studies, Women's Studies and Curriculum II. The Department believes that because philosophy has had such a long and rich history of confronting the fundamental issues central to human existence and experience, it is in a position to contribute significantly to much of the contemporary debate that crosses disciplinary lines.

Great philosophers and their ideas. To offer courses for the purpose of general education requirements that will introduce students to some of the great philosophers and their ideas, the philosophical problems that philosophers have found interesting, and the skills necessary for conceptual analysis.

Socratic humility. To instill an attitude of Socratic humility--an attitude that the one thing they know is that they do not know, and in their pursuit of knowledge and truth, they ought to develop a critical attitude and a sensitivity to the views of others.

VISION: To explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no philosopher has ever gone before.

GOALS:

- Work toward a thoughtful and planned transition in the department as retirements occur around 2020.

- Broaden the department's areas of academic competence in two areas: the philosophy of biology/chemistry, and 19th – 20th century European philosophy in the continental tradition.
- Continue to develop a “student-friendly” department. Includes such initiatives as the student discussion group, art gallery or book browsing trips
- Continue to create opportunities for students to present their work in public settings, locally, regionally and nationally. Includes the on-campus Celebration of Creative Inquiry, strong participation in the annual Minnesota Philosophical Society meetings for undergraduates, and similar conferences nationally.,
- Continue to help students think creatively about the way philosophy can play a role in a meaningful life. Includes the semi-annual Mom/Dad events, which connect alumni with current students.
- Continue to reach out to alumni through an annual newsletter and bringing back three distinguished alumni each year for the Mom/Dad events, and inviting alumni currently teaching philosophy to present lectures.
- Build an endowment that will support increasing student needs to travel for presentation of scholarship at national meetings and for off campus study.

1.2: Programs

The Department of Philosophy offers a major and a minor. In addition we support the following programs:

- Environmental Studies (Philosophies of the Environment)
- Peace Studies (School and Society)
- Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies (Racism and Sexism, Feminist Philosophy)
- Curriculum II (Individual and Community, Individual and Society, Artistic Perspective, Senior Seminar)
- Writing Across the Curriculum Program (Ten courses)
- International Education (Courses in India, Italy, Spain and Morocco in recent years; Ethics of International Development)

The Department of Philosophy offers courses that satisfy the following general education requirements in Curriculum I:

- HIPHI: Racism and Sexism, Mind and Matter, The Individual and Community, School and Society, The Great Philosophers, Philosophies of the Environment, Ancient Philosophy, Modern Philosophy, American Philosophy, Existentialism, Ethics of International Development, Ethical Theory, Applied Ethics, Feminist Philosophy, Philosophy of Science
- MATHL: Elementary Formal Logic, Accelerated Logic
- ARTS: Philosophy of Art
- NONWEST: Ethics of International Development

1.3: Support Relationships

We provide courses for Curriculum II, Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies, Environmental Studies, International Education and The Writing Program.

Section 2: Strategic Review

2.1 Strategic Issues

The Department of Philosophy has four and one third faculty. Despite its small size, we contribute vigorously to the college as a whole, while maintaining a strong major. As part of our last comprehensive external review in 2004, for example, the outside reviewers made the following comments, which we embrace:

- “One person pointed out that the Department of Philosophy embodies the ideal relationship of faculty and the college. It was said they are truly tenured to the college rather than to their department.”
- “They embody the teacher/scholar model as their teaching and scholarship engage in reciprocal relationship.”
- “The members of the Department of Philosophy produce an astounding range of scholarship.”

Our major includes a variety of introductory courses, middle level courses that cover the history and major ideas in Western philosophy, and advanced colloquia including the Philosophy Colloquium, which is required of all seniors.

Philosophy majors regularly go on to graduate school in philosophy, and several now teach at distinguished colleges and universities. In addition, our graduates are strongly interested in social justice issues. After graduation they frequently go on to serve in the Peace Corps, Lutheran Volunteer Corps, Teach for America, and similar organizations. Many go on to choose careers in teaching, health care, law and other helping professions.

Considering the size of the department, the smallest in the state, we contribute at a disproportionately high rate to college interdisciplinary programs, as well as to both general education programs. Virtually our entire curriculum does 'double duty,' serving the needs of both our majors and students seeking to fill their general education requirements. We regularly offer courses, for example, that satisfy four of the nine requirements for Curriculum I. We teach three of the courses required by Curriculum II.

During the recent move from seven courses to six, we reexamined our major as well as college-wide commitments, and managed to move to six courses without reducing our commitments. However, any further enhancements in our contributions to the college or the strength of our major involve major staffing issues. It is widely noted that our most junior colleague is the most senior junior colleague at the college, having been here twenty years. Lisa Heldke will be sixty by the time the current planning process ends. Our strategic planning discussions, therefore, have focused on how we would build the department over the next twelve years, expanding our areas of academic expertise into areas that are universally expected in our discipline, while also dramatically increasing our participation in the life of the college as a whole.

In short, we need two additional tenure track appointments to fill academic needs, provide for the college's needs, and begin the process of transition as retirements occur over the next twelve years.

Our top priority is for a philosopher of science specializing in the intersection of biology and chemistry. We have discussed our interest in hiring someone with a Ph.D. in philosophy and a minimum of a Masters degree in biochemistry or similar field. We envision this person as someone who can reach out to the departments of Chemistry and Biology, perhaps team teaching a First Term Seminar that would bring together students in the sciences and the humanities. If we hire a person with the right credentials, this person could also conceivably teach The Natural World course for Curriculum II. We also envision a person who could participate regularly in planning for the Nobel Conference, helping to keep alive the vision of Nobel as a science-based conference in the context of a college that is committed to the liberal arts. In terms of transitions issues, it is possible that this person could maintain the department's participation in the Environmental Studies Program after Deane Curtin retires.

Our second hiring priority is for a historian who specializes in 19th and 20th century continental philosophy. At present, the Department of Philosophy has no professional historians among its faculty. In addition, because of the split between analytical Anglo-American philosophy and European continental philosophy, none of the current members of the department deem themselves competent to teach such major figures as Hegel, Gadamer, Foucault, or Derrida. This is a major problem, both in terms of the significant holes in our curriculum, and in terms of the case that our best students can make when they apply for graduate school. This person could

also provide great service to the college since scholars in this tradition often take the arts and aesthetics seriously. In terms of the transition, the two faculty who presently teach arts related courses, such as The Visual Perspective in Curriculum II are approaching retirement, and we need to plan for the ability to continue to offer support to general education programs.

As a comparison of staffing levels:

Carleton: 7 faculty; 2 regular visiting appointments; 1986 students
Hamline University 5 faculty plus an endowed chair; 2100 undergraduates
Macalester College: 7 faculty; 1900 students
St. Johns University: 12 faculty; 3928 students
St. Olaf: 10 faculty; 3073 students
University of St. Thomas: 23; 6076 students

Gustavus Adolphus College: 4 1/3 faculty; 2572 students

Conclusion:

The Department of Philosophy affirms the assessment of our external reviewers that we are a department “truly tenured to the college rather than to their department,” whose faculty “embody the teacher/scholar mode,” who are devoted to our students, and yet “produce an astounding range of scholarship.” We have a record of several decades demonstrating enthusiastic support for essentially every important college initiative.

However, we are the smallest department in the state, and we face significant challenges as we work toward major transitions in the department over the next decade. The department needs to expand thoughtfully, both to adapt to changes in our discipline, and to be able to continue to offer a strong major consistent with extensive support to the college.

Deane Curtin, Professor and Chair

George Georgacarakos, Professor

Lisa Heldke, Professor and Sponberg Chair of Ethics

Douglas Huff, Professor

Peg O’ Connor, Professor, Chair of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies