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January 23, 2023

Dr. Laura M. Casamento, President (president@utica.edu)
Dr. Todd J. Pfannestiel, Provost (tipfanne@utica.edu)
Mr. Robert A. Brvenik, Board of Trustees Chair ()
Utica University, 1600 Burrstone Road, Utica, NY 13502

Dear President Casamento, Provost Pfannestiel, and Chair Brvenik:

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 Utica University to preserve and support your philosophy program, rather than eliminating the major.

Utica University describes itself as an institution that provides “outstanding educational pathways” and values “Intellectual growth, creativity, and scholarship in the pursuit of knowledge... Freedom of expression and civil discourse... [and] Ethical behavior and integrity.” It would be difficult to argue that Utica University is living up to these values or fulfilling its commitment to a comprehensive liberal arts education were it to eliminate its philosophy major.

Philosophy is an absolutely core academic 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 Utica University 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.”

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. (<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 Utica, the philosophy department does an especially good job of preparing students for a variety of career paths through not only the depth of

thought required for social mobility, but also tangible and practical experiences like internships at law firms, and visits to ethics committee meetings at hospitals. 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 Critical Thinking, Professional Ethics, The Rise of Modern Science, Ethical Issues in Contemporary Science and Technology, Philosophy of Law, Healthcare Ethics, and Theories of Justice 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 philosophy program at Utica University is especially accomplished. The philosophy faculty not only produce award-winning scholarship in impressive numbers (especially given their teaching expectations), but also make a strong impression on students that is to the benefit of the entire university. For example, the department found that while, on average, 66% of all UU students persist to the next term, that average for students who took at least one philosophy class rose to 86%. The 4-year graduation rate for students who took at least one philosophy class was above the university average, and the 6-year graduation rate was almost 30% higher for those who minored or majored in philosophy.

Finally, who better than Utica University alumni to speak to the value of the philosophy major?

I cannot express enough how much the philosophy major has helped me in obtaining my Juris Doctor degree. The philosophy major significantly improved my writing skills and my ability to make logical arguments, and strengthened my critical thinking skills. While at Utica University, I took the GRE and scored in the 98 percentile on the writing portion and I credit that all to the philosophy major and its faculty, who continue to go above and beyond to help their students succeed. ... By eliminating this program, you are taking away the opportunity from future students to succeed in fields that require one to think critically and logically, write clearly, and analyze and solve problems—each career that I am aware of requires one to have these skills to some extent.” — Viktoria Yudchits, 2018 BA with Honors

I was a double major in Philosophy and Political Science ... What I learned in those Philosophy classes went well beyond preparing me for a future in academia, it prepared me for the challenges I would face in my overall life. To now think that other students will be deprived of that experience because of the sunseting of the Philosophy major causes me great distress... Concentrating on majors that are more marketable may be good for bottom lines, but it is not good for improving critical thinking, it is not good for producing good citizens, and it is not good for the community. I know that I am not the only student positively affected by the Philosophy department at Utica; we have gone on to become lawyers, done work for the government, and given back to the community and the place that has given us so much. This can be traced directly back to the department and the amazing people that work there. It would be a critical mistake to rob future students of this opportunity and I hope beyond hope that this decision will be reversed. — Joshua Turner, 2014 BA

For the sake of your mission, your students, and your community, we strongly urge you and all leaders at Utica University 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: Dr. Christopher Riddle, Chair of the Philosophy Department (cariddle@utica.edu)