Ethics & Values Distro Area

Classics of Pragmatist Thought
Pragmatism is probably the first, but certainly the most important genuinely North American philosophical tradition. The classical writings of Peirce, James, Dewey set the stage for a completely new orientation in epistemology, moral and political theory, psychology and many other fields. Basic to all Pragmatist writers is the belief that the active and interactive human being in its natural and social environment has to stand at the center of reflection. They thus emphasize volitional, procedural, social, and evolutionary aspects of knowledge of any kind. Given this focus on practically involved intelligent agents, political pragmatists like Dewey, Addams, Locke explore the natural origins, revisability and legitimacy of moral and political norms. They develop the idea of a critical use of knowledge and its connection to non-violent democratic conduct. Neopragmatists (Rorty and Putnam) explore the philosophical and political implications of critical thinking.

Learning Objectives
1) Students will become competent in the basic texts in the pragmatist philosophical literature from Peirce to Putnam. 2) Students will acquire an enhanced sensitivity for method, logical analysis of theoretical and practical complexes and their connection, as well as an increased expertise in the close written and oral analysis of complex thoughts and textual sources. 3) One of the central aims will be, following the central topic of pragmatist thought, to offer students a complete reflective awareness of the structure of problem-solving behavior in cognitive, scientific, ethical and cultural affairs, and to train them in applying this competency to cases. 4) Students will acquire an awareness of the close connections between 'theoretical' positions and political conditions.