

Philosophical Horizons

A Community Outreach Program of the
Department of Philosophy at the University of Memphis

Mission: The Department of Philosophy at the University of Memphis is partnering with the American Philosophical Association's committee on Pre-College Instruction of Philosophy on a new initiative to introduce the practice of philosophy to local youth in Memphis Public City schools (Middle Schools and High Schools), particularly those youths who are socio-economically disadvantaged and to those schools that are the least likely to have the resources to implement Philosophy into their curriculum. The history of philosophy and philosophical methodology will be introduced to students through discussion groups lead by Graduate students from the Department of Philosophy at the University of Memphis. We hope to engage students in meaningful discussion of both classic philosophical questions and also issues of specific relevance to contemporary life. An emphasis will be placed on making philosophy (both its history and methodology) accessible and to fostering a classroom environment in which students develop the ability to express themselves clearly and with confidence. The sustainability of this program rests on being able to help local schools implement Philosophy into their curriculum. Thus, our program also aims to introduce Philosophy to Memphis City School teachers and administrators and assist them in implementing philosophical ideas and methodology in the classroom by offering workshops each summer that are tailored to the needs of the Memphis City School system.

Rationale: Why Philosophy? Philosophy deals with fundamental issues regarding the nature of human beings, the meaning of life, and how we should live life. Philosophical training involves the development of critical thinking and analytic skills that allow one to formulate positions with clarity, precision, and depth, and to critically reflect on the positions offered by others. Philosophy teaches one to think well and to the extent that it does it prepares students for any career they might choose to pursue and prepares them for citizenship.

Philosophy in Middle and High Schools will also help prepare students for college. Critical thinking, discussion facilitation, independent thought, and clarity of ideas are skills which undergraduate students rarely have when they enter their undergraduate career. Their chance of success in higher education will be enhanced by being introduced to Philosophy in Middle School and High School.

In addition, philosophical ideas have shaped and informed political, legal, medical, and social discourse for centuries. The philosophical cannon, philosophical education, and Philosophy as a profession, however, remain predominately the domain of the privileged. As a result, race, class, and gender remain under theorized in philosophy and those who are not from privileged races, classes, or genders have remained intellectually disenfranchised. Introducing Philosophy to Memphis area youths who are socio-economically disadvantaged, will have the effect of enriching Philosophical discourse and Philosophical practice. By bringing Philosophy to local youths, we will bring new voices to Philosophy and to the Humanities in general.

Procedure: Discussion groups will be lead by Graduate students in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Memphis. Participants for the discussion groups will be chosen by Memphis City School officials.

Discussions will take place once a week at participating schools. Two students will be assigned to each classroom. One will be the discussion leader, the other will aid in classroom management. All discussion leaders and managers will participate in a training period prior to entering the classroom.

Although class time may vary in relation to time allotted by participating schools, ideal session time is approximately one hour occurring during normal hours of school operation. Ideal group size is ten to fifteen students. Discussions will occur in a designated classroom in which the group will sit in a circle. Early discussions will require substantial instruction and guidance by the discussion group leader. Students will take an increasing role in guiding discussions as they become more comfortable with the practice of philosophical discussion.

All sessions will begin with a question posed by the discussion group leader. In some cases discussion will begin with a series of questions left unresolved from the previous week. Sections of essays, stories, films, and books will be used both to foster discussion and to make abstract philosophical topics more concrete. In some instances students will receive short reading assignments prior to a session in order to prepare for an upcoming discussion.

Students in the program will participate in a culminating experience at the University of Memphis. At the end of the program a formal debate (moderated by the discussion group leader) will occur on campus. An emphasis will be placed on students' ability to form coherent positions on the issue while debating respectfully with their peers.

Outcomes

1. Improve student's critical thinking skills, persuasive writing skills, foster higher-order thinking, and familiarity with forms of argumentation.
2. Familiarity with the history of ideas and ethical thought, in general.
3. Familiarity with and preparation for the college classroom environment including classroom etiquette and norms.

Assessment

1. Pretest and post test: Participants will be given a brief test prior to the start of the discussion sections that will assess their critical reasoning skills, ability to apply abstract theories to concrete cases, argument identification skills, and their familiarity with the history of ideas. At the end of the program, participants will be given a similar test to assess their progress in these areas.

2. Participants will complete a survey during the first meeting that asks for their impressions regarding expectations for their own education, their familiarity with classroom etiquette, their understanding of the role and importance of classroom discussion. A similar survey will be administered at the end of the program.
3. Participant's teachers will be surveyed both prior to the start of the program and at the end of the program to gauge student progress in classroom discussion, higher order thought, and critical thinking skills.

Training: Each summer Graduate students involved in Philosophical Horizons will participate in a two day workshop. They will be joined by local teachers interested in implementing Philosophy into their classroom, administrators, and by faculty from the University of Memphis' College of Education interested the theory behind pre-college instruction of philosophy. This interaction between local teachers and administrators will allow our Graduate students to be introduced to the specific pedagogical issues related to teaching at the Middle and High School level, and the specific curriculum needs of the Memphis City Schools. Presentations will be made by those students who have participated in the program in years past, from the community (Memphis City School administrators) and from those who are now involved in pre-college instruction of Philosophy in Tennessee (most likely to be private school teachers). We will also invite a keynote speaker whose public lecture will launch the workshop. Starting the workshop in this way will allow us to draw greater attention to our program.

During the academic year, graduate students involved in Philosophical Horizons (either as discussion leaders or classroom facilitators) will participate in directed readings and research sessions with the Philosophical Horizons faculty advisor. These sessions will take place on a regular basis and provide an opportunity to discuss content issues and pedagogical issues. The faculty advisor will visit discussion sections in local schools several times per semester in order to provide feedback to discussion leaders on their performance in the classroom.

Budget

Because our program is in its infancy, our greatest funding needs center around training graduate students and building relationships with local teachers and administrators in the Memphis City Schools. To that end, we are seeking funding for a workshop to be held this summer at the University of Memphis. The workshop will take place over two days and will begin with a keynote lecture from one of the leading figures in the field of Philosophy for Children. The purpose of the workshop is four-fold:

1. To introduce Graduate students and Memphis City School teachers and administrators to the theory and practice of Philosophy for Children and to explore ways in which Philosophy can be introduced into the Memphis City Schools (both through Philosophical Horizons and through teacher training), particularly to those schools whose students face significant social and economic challenges.
2. To introduce the curriculum developed by _____ and now being implemented at _____ to graduate students participating in the program

and to Memphis City School teachers and administrators. To solicit ideas about how to develop this curriculum to better meet the needs of the Memphis City Schools and its students.

3. To build relationships that will help sustain and expand Philosophical Horizons in the future.
4. To create a model of engagement that can be used by Philosophy Departments and Ethics centers around the world interested in promoting the Pre-College Instruction of Philosophy. At the end of the three day workshop participants will be asked to provide the organizers with feedback and this feedback along with a full description and self-assessment of the workshop will be made available to funding agencies and those interested in implementing similar programs.

The Workshop will begin on a Thursday night with a keynote lecture. It would then run all day Friday and Saturday.

Honorarium for Keynote speaker:	500.00
Travel and hotel (one night) for Keynote speaker:	1000.00
Food:	
Reception after Keynote: (Keynote lecture will be open to the public to enhance community interest in Philosophical Horizons and Philosophy for Children)	750.00
Coffee, continental breakfast, and lunch for two full days 30 participants	1200.00
Copying and printing for workshop material and advertising for Keynote Lecture and workshop.	500.00
Stipend for Graduate Student workshop organizer: (will aid Department Chair in organizing the conference from beginning to end--copying, correspondence with participants, advertising, space planning, arranging food service, etc.)	1,500.00
Total Budget: 5,450.00	