

## PLATO Philosophy Fund Application

Project Title: Practicing Philosophy With Teens

Dates for Project: April 1 to June 14, 2019

Funding Requested: \$ 11,400

1. Please describe the project, including any work that has already been done to develop it. (500 words max)

In 2017 and 2018, the University of Oregon Philosophy Department offered a 4-credit undergraduate course, “Practicing Philosophy With Teens”, PHIL 399, during the spring term of both years. This course was designed as an extension to PHIL 372, “Teaching Children Philosophy”, which has been supported by Philosophy for the past six years and is now a permanent course in the College of Arts and Sciences.

PHIL 399 provided an important outreach to Eugene, Oregon middle school teachers and students by preparing university undergraduates to facilitate philosophical discussions in 8th grade classrooms in Monroe, Spencer Butte, Kelly and Madison Middle Schools. The course attracted undergraduate students who were philosophy majors, ethics minors, education studies majors, or interested in other disciplines in the humanities. As an interdisciplinary course, PHIL 399 was a collaboration between the University of Oregon Philosophy Department, Education Foundations in the College of Education, and District 4J Public Schools in Eugene, Oregon.

Due to recent budget constraints in the College of Arts and Sciences, the Philosophy Department is no longer able to fund Phil 399. the purpose of this grant proposal is to secure support for the course on a one-time basis while Philosophy and Education Studies seek to find more durable funding, as well as a permanent status, for a course that focuses on undergraduates practicing middle school philosophy.

The work of making PHIL 399 an effective course offering has already been done. The course syllabus has identified clear learning outcomes for undergraduates, organized weekly readings and assignments, and set up peer reflections of ongoing middle school discussions using the university platform CANVAS. In addition, the course has organized online modules of philosophical topics covering themes that include: restorative justice, Moral Luck, Aesthetics, Gender Identity, Ethics and Digital Technology, Friendship, Political Philosophy and Environmental Justice. Additional course components offer creative drama activities that promote verbal fluency with students who are often challenged to introduce philosophical topics by telling stories without scripts; ethical prompts using Regional Ethics Bowl Cases; and

curriculum focusing on effective facilitation strategies using ideas from Peter Worley of The Philosophy Foundation in London, England.

The University of Oregon Philosophy Department Head, Dr. Daniela Vallega-Neu, has agreed to offer the course for spring term, 2019, even though current funding is not yet secured. This way, logistical details that precede the spring term, i.e. securing a classroom space, finding a graduate employee for the course, etc., can be set up in case the course is able to be offered. In addition, a cadre of 8th grade teachers from District 4J Eugene Schools will be organized from Kelly, Madison, Spencer Butte and Monroe Middle Schools so that, if PHIL 399 is offered spring term, they will be ready to involve their classrooms in undergraduate-led philosophical discussions between April and early June.

2. What is the purpose of this project? (500 words max)

The following text is an excerpt from the PHIL 399 Course Syllabus description and learning outcomes:

In this seminar, students will explore ways to tap into the wonder and curiosity that young adults naturally have about their world, their lives and relationships. This course will teach undergraduates to become skillful facilitators of classroom discussions at the middle school level, modeling critical thinking and philosophical inquiry, and focusing on ethical and multicultural topics that connect to young people's experiences.

Undergraduate students will ...

1. Demonstrate an ability to translate conceptual ideas related to ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, political philosophy and gender into facilitating strategies that provide effective discussions in a middle or high school classroom setting.
2. Reflect upon evolving skills as a facilitator, using pedagogical techniques that are modeled by the instructor, fine-tuning when necessary, and participate actively in peer discussions each week.
3. Complete two sets of written assignments during weeks three through ten of the term:
  - Discussion Plans (DP's for short) are posted weekly on Canvas Assignments, expressing fundamental questions and conceptual ideas that relate to the topic for each upcoming discussion with children. Discussion Plans are an opportunity to frame additional questions that can be used by the undergraduate facilitator or team in leading each upcoming discussion, to discuss effective ways to open and close the discussion, to bring up relevant hypothetical situations, to anticipate and respond to students' assumptions,

and to identify specific pedagogical strategies covered in the seminar that will be used by the undergraduate facilitator or team.

- Reflections (typically, 500 to 600-words in length) are posted on Canvas within 24 hours after leading each classroom discussion. Reflections are written in the form of a self-assessment of the facilitator's role (or the undergraduate team's role), as well as the level of student engagement and understanding of the philosophical topic. It will bring up areas for improvement in facilitating strategies to be used in following weeks.

4. Collaborate with seminar student peers, the designated elementary classroom teacher and participating middle school students on philosophical inquiry skills that promote creativity and risk-taking, critical thinking, caring and empathy, and group collaboration during weekly classroom discussions.

In addition, bringing philosophical inquiry to middle school classrooms provides important critical thinking skills to teen learners by modeling collaborative discussions, promoting reasoned arguments, providing group trust and empathy that allows for a diversity of thinking and sharing, and bringing topics of contemporary and historical interest that connect to ongoing middle school units of study.

Along with participation in eight weekly discussions, middle school students will be given time in class to write reflective journals, and to receive written feedback from either their teacher or the undergraduate facilitator(s) assigned to their classroom. Journal writing activities will allow students the opportunity to express their ideas as writers, and to respond to peers by exchanging journals in class.

3. Who will benefit from the project, and how? (500 words max)

PHIL 399, "Practicing Philosophy With Teens" will benefit the following participants:

1. A seminar of twenty-five university of Oregon undergraduates who will apply philosophical ideas to the pedagogy of leading discussions with youth in area middle schools.
2. Approximately 300-325 teenage youth who attend 8th grade at Kelly, Spencer Butte, Madison and Monroe Middle Schools in Eugene, Oregon.
3. Ten participating middle school teachers who will be active participants in eight weekly philosophical circle discussions; and who will receive both written curriculum and modeling of effective facilitation strategies that can be applied across the curriculum.

NOTE: The answer to the second half of question 3 has been covered in section 2 above.

4. What is the plan for developing and implementing the project? Include a timeline.

By February 11, 2019: A cadre of an estimated ten middle school teachers from four participating schools (see above) will be organized for the spring term philosophy outreach. The instructor for the course will communicate with grade level teams at each school and go over the expectations of teacher involvement in the program.

By February 25th, 2019, a revised syllabus for PHIL 399 will be completed and posted on the university platform, CANVAS, for enrolling students to review. A classroom set of books that constitute the text for the course will be ordered for the university bookstore.

In addition, the instructor will visit undergraduate students in targeted education and philosophy courses to promote PHIL 399.

Spring term classes begin at the University of Oregon on April 1st, and end on June 14th. PHIL 399 will be offered during this timeline.

5. What other funding sources have you explored for this project?

Funding was initially explored by contacting the University of Oregon College of Arts and Sciences, the Philosophy Department, and the Education Foundations program in the College of Education.

6. Please list your budget, including any amounts from other sources.

\$6000 - One term salary for the adjunct instructor.

\$5400 - One term Level III salary for the graduate employee.

Total: \$11,400