

APA Committee on Philosophy and Computers

Report 2008

2008 Report to the Board from the
Committee on Philosophy and Computers

The official charge of the Committee on Philosophy and Computers (PAC) is as follows:

The Committee (created by the Board in 1985) collects and disseminates information on the use of computers in the profession, including their use in instruction, research, writing, and publication, and it makes recommendations for appropriate actions of the Board or programs of the Association.

The Committee addresses this charge by:

- (a) Carrying out formal data collection, analysis, and reporting,
- (b) Providing conference presentations at divisional meetings of the Association,
- (c) Awarding the Barwise Prize and facilitating the recipient's presentation at an APA divisional meeting
- (d) Maintaining relationships with other APA committees plus philosophically-oriented and computer-knowledgeable groups,
- (e) Employing the APA Newsletter to inform and converse with members of the profession, and
- (f) Developing auxiliary projects which increase the understanding of computers and their use within the profession and/or which produce recommendations concerning appropriate actions of the Board or programs of the Association.

Elaboration on activities in each of these categories for 2007-08 is provided below.

- a) Carrying out formal data collection, analysis, and reporting

The Committee's charge centers around the collection and dissemination of information on the use of computers in the profession. Nevertheless, no formal mechanism supports the collection and analysis of data. Only one formal survey has been conducted in the 20+ year history of the committee. Despite the efforts of the previous chair (Marvin Croy), the Committee has made little progress on this front.

- (b) Conference presentations at divisional meetings of the Association, and
- (c) Awarding the Barwise Prize

During the past year, the Committee sponsored several sessions at divisional meetings. At the Eastern division meeting, former chair Marvin Croy arranged a session entitled "The Ethics of Emerging Technologies," and was chaired by Michael Kelly (both of University of North Carolina, Charlotte). A second session, arranged by Harriet Baber, was entitled "Technology in support of Philosophy Research," and featured a librarian, 2 philosophers, and a professional ontologist.

Committee member and newsletter editor Peter Boltuc (University of Illinois) organized a session for the 2008 Pacific division meeting. Also at this meeting, the

Committee awarded the 2007 Jon Barwise Prize to Professor David Chalmers, Following an introduction by committee chair, Michael Byron (Kent State University),

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Professor Chalmers delivered a paper on the "extended mind thesis."

(d) Maintaining relationships with other APA committees plus philosophically oriented and computer-knowledgeable groups

The Committee cultivates relationships with organizations that can contribute ideas, encouragement, and/or resources to sustain Committee projects. In particular, the Committee interacts with the membership of the International Association for Computing and Philosophy (IACAP). Committee members often attend the annual North American regional conference of IACAP, and the Committee chair reports on Committee projects at that conference. IACAP is recognized as an affiliated group in each of the Association's divisions and sponsors sessions at their meetings. This year, one such meeting was organized by Marvin Croy (University of North Carolina, Charlotte) for the 2007 Eastern division meeting ("The Ethics of Emerging Technologies"). Many IACAP members are APA members who have an interest in seeing Committee projects thrive, and the Committee endeavors to make use of this good will in developing and advancing its projects.

(e) Employing the APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Computers to inform and converse with members of the profession concerning computer-related issues. Peter Boltuc (University Illinois, Springfield) continues as Newsletter editor. The APA Newsletter provides informative articles and important announcements. Peter has helped a great deal with the transition to a web-based format. He has also been extremely aggressive in pursuing original research papers for publication. The profile of the newsletter is rising, to the point where the Committee is discussing with the APA the prospects of an online journal.

(f) Development of auxiliary projects which increase the understanding of computers and their use within the profession and/or which produce recommendations concerning appropriate actions of the Board or programs of the Association.

Major projects and/or initiatives under discussion include:

1) Making Electronic Pedagogical and Research Resources Accessible

This project aims at constructing an internet resource which would support teaching and research in Philosophy. Some materials related to this goal are currently available on the APA website, but much more should and can be accomplished in this direction. The Committee has also been discussing the prospects of an online archive for philosophical research, comparable to what mathematicians and physicists use.

2) Encouraging international participation in Committee-sponsored sessions.

The Committee values diverse perspectives on the nature of Philosophy and computing, particularly those rooted in distinct cultural and geographic backgrounds. The 2006 Eastern division meeting included a session designed by Committee member, Susan Stuart (University of Glasgow) in which participants were primarily European. The committee will continue to explore ways in which such diversity can enrich its activities.

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In Sum: The goals, projects, and initiatives described above provide an overview of the Philosophy and Computers committee's endeavors during the past year. The Committee hopes that its efforts continue to provide a worthwhile service to the Association.

Submitted by Michael Byron

Chair, Committee on Philosophy and Computers

2007-2008 Committee Members

P-Harriet Baber (2009)

P-Branden Fitelson (2008)

P-Jay Halcomb (2010)

C-Jerry Kapus (2009)

I-Susan Stuart (2008)

E-Amy White (2009)

C-Peter Boltuc (ex officio)