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# “MENTORING THE MENTORS” WORKSHOP TOOLKIT

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## Introduction

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funded the first “Mentoring the Mentors” Workshop organized by the APA’s Diversity Institute Advisory Panel in 2016. The “Mentoring the Mentors” Workshop toolkit, modeled after that workshop facilitated by Ellen Feder and Mariana Ortega in January 2016, underwent significant revisions after subsequent workshops, and especially the workshop facilitated by Mitzi Lee in February 2019. The workshop toolkit also takes into account survey feedback from workshop participants and facilitators.

The “Mentoring the Mentors” workshop intends to support faculty members and graduate students who mentor undergraduate students from underrepresented identities in philosophy. Underrepresented identities in philosophy include women, students of color, first generation college students, LGBTQ+ individuals, individuals with disabilities, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Undergraduate diversity institutes in philosophy, such as the Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute (PIKSI), are built in part on mentorship of undergraduates from these groups. Institutes such as PIKSI often find that the faculty mentors at students’ home institutions have had limited mentoring training and support. Further, as diversity institutes become more competitive—many accept only 20 percent of applicants—the institutes turn away more students. Hence there is a need for mentors at all institutions who can provide that mentoring and support for students from underrepresented groups. The “Mentoring the Mentors” Workshop aims to train mentors of all philosophy students from underrepresented groups, both those who attend diversity institutes and those who do not.

Using this toolkit as a guide, philosophy departments, philosophical societies, and other organizations may run their own “Mentoring the Mentors” workshops for faculty and graduate students in mentoring roles. The toolkit will help them to develop and improve upon their ability to mentor and encourage students from diverse backgrounds to pursue advanced philosophical studies. The information in this toolkit makes it possible for individuals and groups to host the workshop without expertise on the subject. Addressing and improving diversity in philosophy is too important to allow a lack of local experts to impede discussion and progress. Workshop organizers should note that this workshop focuses on mentoring undergraduate students, but many of the principles apply to mentoring graduate students or even junior faculty.

# Building the Workshop

## Facilitation and Administration

We recommend dividing the tasks of running the workshop among two or more individuals. The person or organization sponsoring the workshop should select one or two people to run the workshop session. Though there may be more than one person co-facilitating, throughout this toolkit, we will refer to all people in this role as “facilitator.” The facilitator will serve as teacher and mentor to the group, guiding workshop discussions and bringing expertise in philosophy, mentorship, or academic diversity. The facilitator does not need to be an expert on mentoring undergraduates from underrepresented identities specifically, though this person ought to be a leader with experience in running seminars or workshops. When an experienced facilitator may not be available, this workshop toolkit provides more background information and guided content in the form of “Discussion Scenarios” in the section on training mentors.

At least one person who is not the facilitator should take on administrative tasks and workshop logistics. This person will book the workshop space, prepare workshop supplies and answer questions leading up to the event. This administrative organizer may be responsible for workshop promotion as well as collecting and organizing applications. This person may read applications and, working with the facilitator and/or sponsor of the workshop, send invitations to selected participants. In the past, hosts of the “Mentoring the Mentors” Workshop such as the APA have assigned a staff person to play this role, before selecting the facilitator. Throughout this toolkit, we will refer to this role as “organizer.”

## Timeline for Planning the Workshop

The following are a few suggested deadlines for both facilitator and organizer leading up to a workshop.

- At least ten months out, institutional host and organizer should narrow down potential facilitators.
- At least seven months out, a facilitator should be selected and confirmed. The date of the workshop may be chosen before or after the facilitator to allow flexibility around the facilitator’s schedule.
- At least five months out, the organizer should prepare advertisements for participant applications.
- At least five months out, the host, organizer, and facilitator should work together in crafting the workshop schedule, including picking a final date (if this has not already been done).
- If the facilitator would like to invite panelists or speakers—particularly more well-known speakers—the facilitator should contact these potential speakers as far in advance as possible. If the facilitator plans to invite individuals who are attending a conference, begin inviting these speakers as soon as the conference program is public and registration is underway.
- At least four months out, applications and deadlines should be made public and shared with the appropriate populations of faculty and graduate students.
- At least three months out, applicants should be due; if possible, attendees should be notified within two weeks of submitting their applications whether or not they were chosen to attend.
- At least two months out, the facilitator should begin communication with attendees, sending out information such as reading assignments, requests for biographies, and questions to prepare before attending. Panelists and guest speakers should also be notified about the workshop schedule and

should be given information on preparing for their workshop session (e.g., topics to discuss, questions to answer).

- At least one month out, the schedule for the day of the workshop should be finalized. This is the time to make catering plans, check back in with participants and speakers about building addresses and room numbers, and share any other pertinent information such as reimbursement forms, required pre-workshop assignments, and materials to bring to the workshop.
- In the few days leading up to the workshop, the facilitator and/or the organizer should be readily available via email to answer questions about the workshop and solve any last minute problems.

## Invited Speakers and Panels

It is the responsibility of the facilitator to invite experts on the topics of mentorship, diversity in philosophy, and graduate admissions to supplement the discussion in either speaker or panel format. It is up to the facilitator to choose which panels and sessions would be of most interest.

Past facilitators have found that it is important to include plenty of time for discussion, and not to fill up the whole day with panels and speakers without leaving enough time for the workshop participants to discuss the problems, issues, and questions that they are bringing to the table.

The following sections outline some ideas for sessions and panels that facilitators have used in the past.

### Session on diversity and inclusion

This session might include academic professionals who specialize in promoting diversity and inclusion at their home institutions, or academic psychologists who specialize in research pertinent to this field. For example, the first “Mentoring the Mentors” Workshop invited Bernadette Sanchez, a psychology professor and expert on mentoring middle school and high school students from diverse backgrounds. She was able to describe different studies concerning effective mentoring programs and strategies for these populations. If the host organization or institution has dedicated professionals in diversity and inclusion, it may be useful to invite them to share their expertise. Past facilitators have found that it is more helpful to have experts who can speak about specific mentoring strategies, rather than those who speak more broadly on the need for mentoring or the value of diversity in the university.

Another option is to include readings or recorded lectures concerning effective mentoring for diverse populations as homework assignments ahead of or following the workshop. Or a workshop could include someone from one of the STEM fields where efforts to mentor students from underrepresented groups are far ahead of those in philosophy. For example, one facilitator invited the University of Missouri Director of the Initiative for Maximizing Student Diversity, Mark Hannick, to discuss diversity in the STEM fields. The director was able to give participants many ideas about programs and strategies for promoting diversity in the “pipeline,” in particular via undergraduate mentorship of fellow undergraduates.

### Session on the diversity institutes

Past facilitators have invited diversity institute organizers or board members to speak in person or via videoconference during an informative workshop session. These speakers—both faculty and graduate

students who were alumni of diversity institutes—can speak to issues such as the effectiveness of mentoring at diversity institutes and the nuts-and-bolts of how the institutes are organized. The diversity institutes we discuss here include the PIKSI programs (PIKSI-Rock, PIKSI-Boston, and PIKSI-Logic), Rutgers Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy, Summer Immersion Program in Philosophy at Brown, Summer Program for Women in Philosophy at UC San Diego, Pittsburgh Summer Program, and COMPASS@Michigan, as well as the Stanford/CCNY Summer Research Program and the CUNY Pipeline Summer Institute (which focus more broadly on the humanities, but include philosophy). Many participants in the “Mentoring the Mentors” workshops have been students at these institutes and have returned as graduate assistants. They see themselves as “paying it forward,” and are an invaluable resource for discussion about what occurs at the diversity institutes.

### Session on graduate admission in philosophy

Faculty members who have served as directors of admissions for their graduate programs are often in a good position to give specific advice to students from underserved backgrounds about their unique admissions processes, what types of resources applicants should seek out, and how applicants can present and contextualize their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, if the workshop is occurring at a conference such as an APA divisional meeting, facilitators should check the meeting program for directors of admissions for both MA and PhD programs in philosophy, as they will be more likely to give their time to the workshop if they will already be on site. Past facilitators have found it useful to send out a call on social media to find interested individuals who will be attending the conference where the workshop will take place. Similarly, if the workshop is occurring at an academic institution, organizers should contact present or past directors of graduate admissions in philosophy. If the host institution does not have a graduate program in philosophy, facilitators should consider inviting admissions committee members from other programs for a panel, either in person or via videoconference. Every graduate program is different, and awareness of those differences is crucial to effectively mentoring students who intend to pursue graduate study in philosophy. For this reason, it is helpful to invite directors from a variety of different programs including MA programs, both analytic and continental or pluralist programs, philosophy graduate programs at both public and private universities, programs from different regions of the country, and so on. If graduates admissions committee members cannot attend, this toolkit contains written advice on graduate admissions from present or past admissions committee members of several popular graduate programs in philosophy.

### Participating Mentors

Most iterations of the “Mentoring the Mentors” Workshop have required an application for participation. There are generally many more individuals interested in participating in the workshop than one facilitator can manage. Depending on funding and event space, we recommend capping the number of participants at 18–20 per workshop. The organizer and facilitator will determine which applicants are invited. They may use a first-come, first-served approach or a competitive application approach for admitting participants. Usually, some applicants are graduate students and others are faculty members. It is worth considering what kind of balance of the two is ideal in a workshop. Graduate students are future faculty members, and because many of them are already graduate part-time instructors, they are already serving as mentors to the undergraduates in their classes. Some graduate students are already serving as directors of diversity

institutes, or as mentors in those institutes, and hence are seeking training to serve in those roles. On the other hand, faculty members tend to be more experienced, and the ones who come to a “Mentoring the Mentors” Workshop tend to be the individuals in their departments that undergraduates seek out for advice and mentoring. Graduate students in a workshop tend to still be thinking about how *they* want to be mentored, and are under immense pressure themselves to make it to the academic job market. Faculty are often able to speak from experience about what types of mentoring were most effective for themselves and for their mentees. For these reasons, one might balance in favor of faculty members over graduate students, especially graduate students who are in the first or second years of study.

On the application forms, consider asking about what experience participants bring to the discussion and what they would like to get out of the workshop. Once applicants confirm their attendance, it might be helpful for the facilitator to dig even deeper into the expectations that participants have for the workshop. For example, the facilitator might send emails requesting topics and problems they would like to discuss, and a preliminary schedule so that the participants know what to expect.

Hosts and organizers should consider incentivizing participation. This could range from providing refreshments and awarding a certificate of completion to offering stipends to those who attend.

## Workshop Framework

The facilitator may select resources and discussion topics based on the needs and expectations of the organization and workshop participants. Did participants say that they would like concrete advice on how to support their mentees in going to graduate school? Did they indicate a desire to practice mentoring techniques for students from diverse backgrounds? Each section of this toolkit introduces a topic and provides introductory information to keep the conversation going. The section on training mentors also contains “Discussion Scenarios” for groups that need more guidance.

The following is a sample schedule for a one-day “Mentoring the Mentors” workshop. Sections of the toolkit that correspond to the discussion sessions are in italics. This schedule should be adapted to the needs and expectations of each workshop’s host and participants.

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM	Welcome and Introductions (Coffee Provided)
9:30 AM – 10:30 AM	Opening Discussion: <i>Addressing the Lack of Diversity in Philosophy</i> , workshop goals, and <i>Mentoring Reflection</i>
10:30 AM – 10:45 AM	Break
10:45 AM – 11:45 AM	Discussion: <i>Effective Mentoring</i> and <i>Mentoring and Diversity</i>
11:45 AM – 12:45 PM	Lunch Discussion: Use this time to wrap up morning conversations or to begin discussion of tips for mentoring underrepresented students.



12:45 PM – 1:45 PM	Discussion: <i>Mentoring, Diversity, and Philosophy</i> and <i>Additional Tips for Mentoring Underrepresented Students</i>
1:45 PM – 2:45 PM	Panel Discussion: Graduate Admissions
2:45 PM – 3:00 PM	Afternoon Break
3:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Panel Discussion: Mentorship at Diversity Institutes
4:00 PM – 5:00 PM	Closing Discussion: <i>Future Directions</i> and <i>Concluding Thoughts</i>

Consider how much time participants will be willing and able to devote to serious conversation and discussion of these topics. This workshop could be half a day, a whole day, or multiple days. If it is a challenge to devote a whole day to the workshop, consider breaking these topics down into a series of shorter, one-topic workshops over the course of a semester. No matter the duration, it is crucial that participants have break time to refresh and process the content and discussions of the workshop.

The facilitator should decide how technology fits into the workshop. Should participants bring laptops or notetaking devices? Some facilitators have found success with online community platforms such as Padlet or Slack, on which participants may comment before, during, and after the workshop. These platforms let the facilitator share resources and readings and let the participants ask questions as they come up.

In past surveys, some participants and speakers have noted that they did not know what to expect until they arrived at the workshop. The facilitator should inform both participants and speakers of what they are expected to discuss in the workshop. For example, speakers often find it helpful if the facilitator sends specific instructions about the topics they should cover and their audience’s needs. The facilitator should also compile a list of questions to address during the workshop, as well as a directory of participants so that all involved have sense of who is in the room. It is therefore helpful to collect the biographies and contact information of participants, facilitators, and panelists in advance. Sending this to participants and speakers before the workshop both gives them some idea of what to expect, and allows the conversation to continue long after the workshop is over, since one of the chief advantages of the workshop is the opportunity for networking among individuals who share a common mission and set of concerns. Some questions that the facilitator and the organizer can ask participants are included below:

- What do you hope to get out of this workshop? Do you have any special requests for topics of discussion?
- Have you mentored students before? Have you ever recommended a student for a diversity institute (e.g., PIKSI)?
- Have you ever participated in a diversity institute?
- Have you ever had a mentor?
- Please provide a brief bio (7–10 sentences) to introduce yourself to the group.

## Addressing the Lack of Diversity in Philosophy

We suggest that the facilitator first address the purpose of the workshop and the lack of diversity in the discipline of philosophy. The purpose of this workshop is for people who serve as mentors of students from underrepresented backgrounds to practice effective mentoring skills, in pursuit of the larger goal of diversifying the professional pipeline in philosophy. This workshop provides opportunities for both open reflection and structured discussion of concrete information related to diversity in philosophy and the mentorship of underrepresented students. Participants and the facilitator should have time during the opening discussion to share their goals for the workshop.

There is no single reason why there has historically been a disproportionately low number of women, people of color, and other diverse identities in philosophy. Recognition of the issue of diversity in the philosophical profession has grown in recent years. The APA's Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) periodically reports on the percentage of women in the profession. The CSW stated that in 1992, only 13 percent of the profession were women. This was a notably lower number than other humanities disciplines, such as literature and foreign languages (where women were represented nearly equally with men) or history (where women represented nearly 25 percent of the profession). By 2003, the number of women in the profession increased to about 20 percent,<sup>1</sup> and by 2011, the number of women earning doctorates in philosophy approached 33 percent.<sup>2</sup>

As the following graph displays, bachelor's degrees in philosophy for "All Racial/Ethnic Minorities" have been disproportionately low for decades, but have increased slightly since 1995, and "Traditionally Underrepresented" (excluding Asians/Pacific Islanders) and "Hispanic" populations have increased as well. However, the data for "Asian or Pacific Islanders," "African American, Non-Hispanic," "Temporary Resident," and "American Indian or Alaska Native" populations reflects stagnation at 5–10 percent or lower. The proportion of master's and doctoral degrees awarded to these groups are even lower than those for bachelor's degrees, and the proportion of people of color pursuing academic philosophy as a profession are lower still. According to the Humanities Indicators project, data available from 2014 suggests that "traditionally underrepresented minorities" (excluding Asians/Pacific Islanders) earned fewer than 8 percent of PhDs in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Norlock, "Women in the Profession: A More Formal Report to the CSW"

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbXhcGFjb21taXR0ZWVvbnRoZXN0YXR1c29md29tZW58Z3g6NTlmYTEExZDBiY2U1MDliYw>

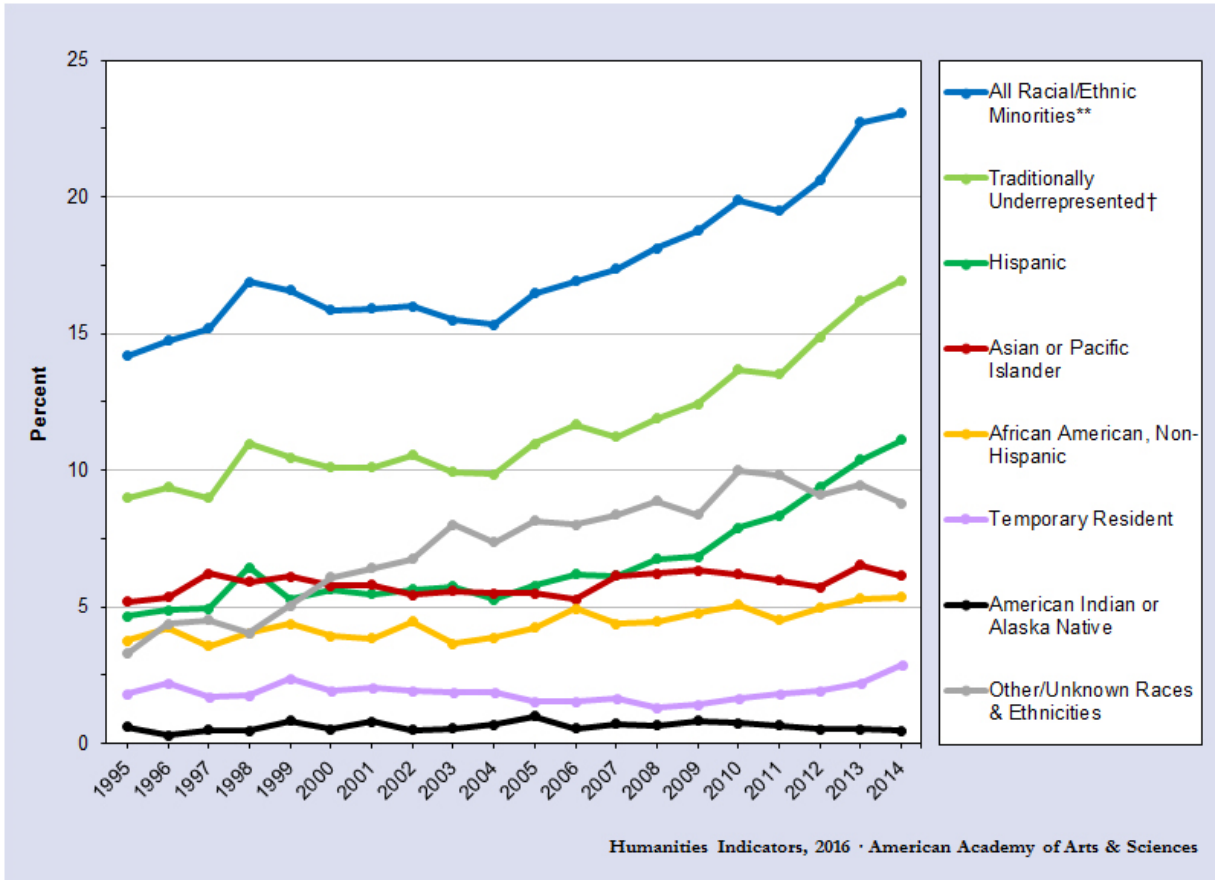
<sup>2</sup> Kathryn Norlock, 2011 Letter of Update to Colleagues

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbXhcGFjb21taXR0ZWVvbnRoZXN0YXR1c29md29tZW58Z3g6NGQxNWNhYWJzNmExOWNhZg>

<sup>3</sup> 2012 American Academy of Arts & Sciences for Inclusion in the Humanities Indicators

<http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=266>

## Percentages of Bachelor's Degrees in Philosophy Awarded to Minorities<sup>4</sup>



Efforts to address diversity in philosophy often focus on gender and race or ethnicity. It is also important to include and recognize other underrepresented and marginalized populations whose differences may be less visible, such as students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and first-generation college students. These identities further diversify the profession in valuable ways.

Some mentors have misgivings about encouraging students from underrepresented groups to go into academic philosophy when the academic job market in the humanities is very competitive. It is important to acknowledge this early on in the workshop, perhaps using an assigned reading or resources.

<sup>4</sup> \*\* Includes students who are citizens or permanent residents and who are identified by their institutions as African American (non-Hispanic), American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Hispanic.

† Students counted under “Racial/Ethnic Minorities” minus Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The IPEDS data were accessed and analyzed via the National Science Foundation's online science and engineering resources data system, [WebCASPAR](http://www.nsf.gov/ipeds).

## Resources and Further Reading

### Online Resources

Scholarly societies and institutions across the discipline of philosophy have increased their efforts to improve diversity in recent years. The [APA page on diversity resources](#) hosts a large collection of information, strategies, and best practices on diversity and inclusion. The APA also maintains a [Diversity and Inclusiveness Syllabus Collection](#).

The [APA page on diversity institutes](#) provides basic program and application information for the following diversity institutes:

- [Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institutes \(PIKSI\)](#) (PIKSI-Rock at Penn State, PIKSI-Boston, and PIKSI-Logic in Boston)
- [Rutgers Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy](#)
- [Summer Immersion Program in Philosophy at Brown University \(SIPP@Brown\)](#)
- [Summer Program for Women in Philosophy \(SPWP\) at UC San Diego](#)
- [Pittsburgh Summer Program in Philosophy of Science](#)
- [COMPASS at Michigan Workshop for Students Considering Graduate School in Philosophy.](#)

Organizations such as [Minorities and Philosophy \(MAP\)](#) and the [Society for Women in Philosophy \(SWIP\)](#) create community for underrepresented populations in philosophy. Directories such as the [UPDirectory](#) aim to increase visibility of currently working philosophers from underrepresented backgrounds.

### Articles and Books

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# Training the Mentors

## Part 1: Mentoring Reflection

Facilitators might begin their discussion of mentorship with a reflection activity using the following questions:

- What goals do you have for yourself as a mentor or advisor? What goals do you have for your mentees or advisees?
- Think of a time when a mentor or advisor offered you advice or counsel that was less than helpful (even if their intentions were good). What might that person have considered before offering you that advice? How did receiving that advice make you feel?
- Think of a time when a mentor or advisor offered you advice or counsel that was particularly effective or useful to you. What made that advice good? How did receiving that advice make you feel?
- Based on your own experiences receiving mentoring and advising, both good and bad, what practices might you try to incorporate as a mentor and advisor yourself? What might you try to avoid?
- What steps could you take today to achieve these goals, both for yourself and your mentees or advisees? Which goals do you need help or advice to achieve, and do you know where you might start looking for that assistance?

## Part 2: Effective Mentoring

After participants have had the chance to speak about their own mentoring experiences, the facilitator can segue into the next discussion about how to be an effective mentor. If participants come into the workshop with exceptional mentoring experience, a facilitator may opt for a discussion that allows participants to learn from each other and provide their own tips. If the participants come into the workshop looking for a groundwork lesson in effective mentoring, then this section will serve that purpose.

### Mentoring versus academic advising

Academic advising relationships typically focus on ensuring students sign up for appropriate classes each term and may include discussion of broader academic and career goals. Some universities require this kind of meeting each term before students can register for classes, and in such cases, students will usually have an assigned advisor.

Mentoring goes beyond this, since it involves the building of a relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Mentorship tends to align more closely with the term “relational advising.” Unlike the traditional advising model where the advisor is a “sage” who knows all and the advisee is a passive recipient of that knowledge, relational advising encourages both parties to grow from the relationship and learn from each other. Mentorship is a mutually beneficial relationship that develops and deepens over time.

The relational advising model requires that the mentor admit to not knowing all the answers. Learning something new together is one way in which the relationship helps the mentor grow and learn. A mentor who admits to not knowing something can have a profound effect on the mentee. This kind of interaction with a mentor may help a mentee avoid or address feelings of inadequacy or “impostor syndrome.”

### Goal setting

The mentor and the mentee should start by sharing goals for their relationship. This may be a new role for the mentee and even the mentor. A specific question such as, “What do you want to get out of this relationship?” might be a challenge for the mentor and the mentee to answer.

The mentor may begin with a broader discussion of goals. What academic goals does the mentee have? What career goals does the mentee have? The mentor should tell the mentee that it is okay to be unsure; goals do not need to be specific or far-reaching at first. One might begin with a goal such as, “get good grades this term.” From there, the mentee can get more specific—e.g., define “good grade”—before moving on to a deeper discussion about challenges this goal might present and strategies for overcoming them.

The mentor might start with a goal such as, “support my mentee in achieving [insert mentee goal here],” from which point the mentor can talk about specific ways to be helpful, as well as things that the mentee might *not* want. For each goal, it can be useful to set up a timeline with benchmarks towards that goal, as well as establishing points to check progress.

These are merely suggestions; both mentor and mentee may set goals and measure achievement differently. This is why discussion of expectations is very important. Without open communication, it may be challenging to motivate any further interaction or develop a meaningful relationship.

### Time

Time is often a difficulty for faculty, as many faculty members take on numerous service and professional commitments beyond their teaching duties. However, just as any other relationship takes time to establish, a mentoring relationship may not fully develop over one or two meetings a term. Regular, sustained contact is crucial to this kind of relationship building. Availability is also extremely important; mentees need to know that they can count on their mentors.

When students perceive faculty as being too busy or not having time for them, it creates a barrier. Consider that “busy” is a signifier of importance in society, and that if the mentor is too busy then the mentee may feel unimportant. This is not to say that mentors should devote countless hours to the service of mentorship either. Intentional use of words is equally important as volume and frequency of time.

It can be a challenge for busy mentors to fulfill their academic roles and mentor multiple students, as this can grow into a time-consuming activity on top of research and teaching. The work of a mentor should be recognized as important labor, and though voluntary service is admirable, faculty with experience sustainably mentoring students often advise newer mentors to ask their department for a teaching load reduction or some form of monetary compensation for the additional work of being a mentor.

## Reducing stigma

A third aspect of effective mentoring is working to reduce the stigma of “needing help.” Some perceive mentorship as a solution for individuals who need particular help or who are facing a difficult challenge on their own. Everyone may benefit from mentoring, at times of struggle as well as success. Mentoring is about establishing a mutually beneficial relationship of trust wherein both parties share difficulty and progress. Mentors can make this message clear by explaining that many successful philosophers have benefited from mentorship, and that it is both a normal and positive activity along any career path.

## The importance of being proactive

It is useful to offer help, rather than wait for students to ask for it. Students may feel that they are imposing on their mentors. Asking for help may make a student feel more exposed—and may seem like an admission of vulnerability or even defeat. When mentors proactively offer help, students may feel more comfortable receiving that help. Some individuals who need mentorship are shy or may not feel comfortable accepting structured offers of mentorship, so warm and persistent offers of mentorship may be necessary.

Mentors may be inclined to say, “I’m here any time you need me—you can always come to me.” This is a great sentiment, and it is important to communicate that availability and care. But there is a difference between that and specific offers such as, “I can be a better mentor to you if I understand more about your goals. How about we meet on Wednesday at 4?” The first message puts the onus on the student to seek out help, while the second message gives the student the choice to accept or reject the offer. The first is a passive option and the second is an active invitation.

Good mentors meet students wherever they are in their academic and life journeys. Perhaps a mentor thinks it is appropriate for philosophy students in their junior year to be well on their way to developing quality papers for undergraduate journal publication. There is a world of difference between, “You should be working on a publishable paper by now,” and, “How do you feel about your progress as a philosophical writer? What do you think your strengths are? Where do you think you might need some work?” When guiding a student through self-assessment and goal making, these questions change the conversation to one of progress and improvement, rather than one of shame.

Alternatively, a mentee might be on-track in terms academic progress, but needs practical advice when it comes to considering graduate school. This workshop toolkit will discuss graduate school admissions in a later section, but it is worth noting that some students may be less interested in “moral support” than in learning what belongs in a resume or a statement of purpose. Communicating with mentees about their expectations for the relationship is important, as is the ability to provide diverse forms of support. Some students might not know what they need, and so it is important to be encouraging. Marginalized students especially tend to receive less praise and encouragement than other students. The particular needs of mentees vary; it is important to meet students wherever they are rather than assuming “one size fits all.”

## Part 3: Mentoring and Diversity

This part of the workshop pertains to mentorship of students from diverse backgrounds. The mentoring principles discussed in Part 2 will continue to hold true, but there are several topics the facilitator may



wish to address that will help workshop participants to increase understanding and awareness of the unique challenges underrepresented groups may face. Part 3 covers the basics of cultural competence and introduces institutional barriers. The end of this section contains a discussion scenario titled “A Special Event” to support the discussion if the group needs further guidance.

## Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is a very large topic—and is of great concern especially to mentors who do not share the same cultural and socio-economic background as their mentees. Many mentors worry that these differences mean that they cannot effectively mentor students from underrepresented groups. For example, a white male professor from an upper-middle-class background might worry about whether he can effectively mentor a black female student who is the first in her family to go to college. Well-meaning mentors worry about unwittingly making assumptions about their mentees that get in the way of effective mentoring—assumptions about their values, goals, and life situations. Since a mentor often advises mentees about important life decisions, drawing upon the mentor’s own experiences when doing so, these differences are significant and should not be ignored.

Most of the current work on cultural competence frames it as a process of constant improvement in several areas. **Cultural awareness** begins with self-knowledge related to one’s own identity (values, customs, beliefs, etc.), as well as an awareness that others differ in those respects. **Cultural knowledge** begins with learning more about these differences, e.g., what *are* the values, customs, beliefs of others, and how are they similar or different to one’s own? **Cultural sensitivity** is not only an awareness of one’s differences from others, but the consideration of how open-minded and respectful one may or may not be to those differences. It begins with an examination of personal attitudes of judgment based on these differences and continues with work on why these beliefs persist. **Cultural competence** considers what changes one should make in thought and behavior in order to work in a respectful and informed manner with those who are different. On a basic level, cultural competence is about consciousness of difference. Mentors should not assume that their mentee has had the same or even similar life experiences. Things that may seem automatic and easy to a mentor may be entirely new to a mentee. Requests or expectations that seem like no big deal to one student might pose a hardship to another.

## Navigating Identities

Even when a mentor and mentee share common identities, such as being first-generation college students, the mentor should not express perceived commonality with a response like, “It was the same for me. I’m the first in my family to go to college, so I know exactly what it’s like for you.” It may be better to say, “I am also the first in my family to go to college, and my experience was like this. What was your experience like?” A conversation about similarities and differences between experiences treats the mentee as an individual.

Some mentoring relationships develop organically and others grow out of programmatic pairings. Mentors should still not assume a commonality of experience with any shared identities in an identity-based mentoring program. For example, a mentee might be assigned a particular mentor because both their families emigrated from the same country. Having lived in the United States since childhood, the mentee

might feel boxed into that identity, having wished for a mentorship pairing based on other factors. Maybe the mentor and mentee have had some similar experiences, but maybe they have not. The pair may have met similar hardships, but at different levels of intensity. A mentor in this scenario should have a conversation with the mentee where they each share their own experiences and learn more about each other's experiences. *Then* the mentor and mentee can have an informed discussion of similarities and differences.

It is also important to do research and choose words wisely when discussing mentee identities. A mentor should not ask a mentee to speak for an entire identity group by asking for an explanation of a cultural tradition. Individuals of marginalized identities already face constant pressure from society to represent their entire group. Mentors can relieve that burden by asking about mentees' particular traditions, experiences, and celebrations, instead of asking for a history lesson. This allows mentees to explain what is important and relevant to their lives without the pressure of representing their entire identity.

### Institutional Barriers

Mentors should be aware that many students from underrepresented groups have faced institutional barriers before and during college. Institutional barriers are structural components of an institution such as policies and requirements that systematically disadvantage minority populations.

Many institutional barriers are so deeply engrained in the culture that they take a lot of consideration to uncover. In the case of higher education, one might consider the question of qualifications. Why would a hiring manager not choose the most qualified candidate for the job? To answer this, one must ask how we define those qualifications. Is it a matter of pedigree? Of publication record? How might certain populations be systematically excluded from the opportunity to pursue those qualifications? How might exclusion at one level snowball into further exclusion down the line? Do these qualifications reveal anything about the abilities of the candidate, or are they "code" for a certain type of person?

Institutional barriers vary widely from campus to campus, so mentors should spend time thinking about the specific barriers at their institutions and how they might address them.

When considering institutional barriers related to **admissions**, mentors might ask, "What kind of students does my institution typically admit? What does it mean to be a 'good fit' for campus? Does my institution have a policy on undocumented students? What materials are typically required in admissions, and how might students from different backgrounds find these requirements more or less challenging to meet? Do all students have access to standardized test prep? Can they afford the application fee?"

When considering institutional barriers related to **course materials**, mentors might ask, "Does my institution strive to present a variety of voices in course materials? How might our students from backgrounds that are not represented in course materials feel about what they are learning? How might such an environment be discouraging or promote feelings of not belonging? How might some students have difficulty with materials presented in particular formats?"

When considering institutional barriers related to the **environment of the institution**, mentors might ask, “Have there been incidents on campus of hostile environment such as insensitive party themes, harassment of minority populations, sexual assault, etc.? How has the administration responded to these incidents? How might both the incidents and the ensuing responses contribute to populations feeling unwelcome or unsafe on campus?”

Once mentors have identified some of the institutional barriers that might exist on their campus or within the profession of philosophy, it is great to be mindful of them in mentoring practice. Recognizing the kinds of barriers that a mentee will likely encounter is the first step in developing strategies to overcome them.

## Part 4: Mentoring, Diversity, and Philosophy

Part 4 briefly reiterates what the current state of diversity in philosophy looks like, acknowledges some commonly perceived barriers to change, and offers resources to improve outcomes for mentees and build a culture of inclusivity within philosophy departments.

### Mentoring Diverse Students in Philosophy

When mentoring diverse students in philosophy, mentors should first consider current and historic representation in the field. For example, in a program that grants doctorates in philosophy, it is likely that fewer than half of the tenured/tenure-track faculty members are women.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the lack of diversity in academic hiring is the fact that the white male philosophers dominate the traditional Western philosophical canon. Thankfully, there are resources that help to increase the visibility of the diverse voices that already exist in philosophy. It is important to signal that philosophy is for everyone, not just one dominant identity group. A simple means of doing this is to post images around philosophy departments of philosophers from a wide variety of backgrounds with short biographical narratives describing some of their major works. If a department maintains a blog or a Facebook page, they could do something similar as an ongoing feature. Evidence that non-white or non-male philosophers exist and are noteworthy can help in the development of role models and in building a positive group identity.

A further step in helping mentees build positive group identity with philosophers of similar backgrounds is to point them towards the undergraduate diversity institutes and diversity-oriented organizations mentioned in the introduction to this workshop. Please see [APA website on undergraduate diversity institutes in philosophy](#) for program and admissions details. Based on feedback from participants, these institutes have proven effective in inspiring persistence in the field. One of the simplest yet most impactful things mentors can do is to encourage their mentees to attend one of these institutes.

As for diversity-oriented organizations, if a department does not yet have a chapter of [Minorities and Philosophy](#) (MAP), participants and their mentees might explore starting one. Additionally, the [UPDirectory](#) provides a list of people in philosophy who self-identify as members of underrepresented groups.

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<sup>5</sup> Julie Van Camp, *Tenured/Tenure-track Faculty Women at 98 U.S. Doctoral Programs in Philosophy*. September 10, 2018. Retrieved from [http://web.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/doctoral\\_2004.html](http://web.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/doctoral_2004.html)

As to the issue of not having a background of expertise in either the history of philosophy beyond the traditional Western canon or in contemporary work by philosophers from under-represented backgrounds, this is an excellent opportunity to let a commitment to mentorship be a means of improving depth and breadth of knowledge. A great place to start is the [Diversity and Inclusion Syllabus Collection](#) (maintained by the APA's [Committee on Inclusiveness in the Profession](#)). This collection can not only help in developing class syllabi, but also serve as a starting point in the scholarly pursuits of works beyond the traditional Western canon. One does not need to become an expert in the field to incorporate diverse voices into the curriculum.

Mentoring individuals from underrepresented identities may not differ strongly from mentoring individuals from majority identities, but it may take some extra steps of conscientious consideration about how to do so in a way that is sensitive and respectful. Furthermore, mentoring diverse populations in philosophy may not differ significantly from mentoring diverse populations in any other discipline. It does take some awareness of the field, and some efforts to develop strong messages that counter dominant narratives and assumptions about who “belongs” in philosophy. This will take some work on the part of the mentor, but that work will translate to improved outcomes for students.

### Additional Tips for Mentoring Underrepresented Students

- Mentoring is not “one size fits all,” so a mentor should take the time to understand a mentee’s unique circumstances and needs. There are two types of mentoring—one providing psychosocial support and another which is more instrumental, e.g., providing the mentee with valuable “insider” information about how to achieve particular goals. Some students may already have a lot of psychosocial support but need practical and informed advice about how to achieve their goals. Others need psychosocial support in addition to help figuring out what their goals should be.
- Mentors should strive to make active invitations where a mentee may accept an offer, as opposed to passive options where the mentee must always ask for help from the mentor.
- Mentors and advisors should meet students where they are, not where they “should be,” on their academic journey.
- A mentor should take students’ work seriously and offer constructive, not harsh, criticism. Mentors should give detailed writing feedback that is sincere and honest. Mentees emphasize how affirming and inspiring it is to have a faculty member take their work seriously. For many students, this may be the first time anyone has taken their intellectual ideas seriously or encouraged them to do original creative work.
- Mentors should be aware that some mentees might not have had access to the same academic resources growing up as other students in the same program.
- No one should assume that English is anyone’s first language.
- When supporting a mentee, mentors should avoid microaggressions such as, “You write really well for a woman,” or, “You are very likely to get into this program because of your race.”
- Expressing enthusiasm such as, “It is great to hear from you!” when mentees reach out can do a lot to quell anxiety that many students feel in asking for help.

- Not all students have had positive experiences in meeting one-on-one with authority figures. A meeting in an office may be intimidating, reminding students of past experiences when they felt like they were “in trouble.”
- Mentors and advisors ought to be honest in giving advice such as, “Do not go to graduate school if you have to borrow money,” or letting students know when their grades or GRE scores are not high enough to get into a competitive graduate program—while making sure not to let the mentee feel belittled. Some students appreciate being told, “Only go to graduate school if you are sure there is nothing else you want to do,” and appreciate a frank discussion of other career possibilities. Mentees usually want to have a realistic sense of their options and want to know about the range of opportunities that are available. For example, many students have only the vaguest sense of the academic job market, of placement records, salaries, and the types of careers and positions available to someone with a PhD.
- Mentors should discuss goals, strategies, and expectations on a regular basis. This gives the mentoring relationship structure and purpose. They should give mentees the help they need and/or assist them in self-assessment to determine what they may need.
- Mentoring is a relationship that takes time to build. A mentor and mentee should respect each other’s time. Mentors should never give the impression that they are “too busy” for their mentees, but they should also guard their own time as well, especially since students sometimes tend to gravitate to the same faculty members repeatedly.
- Mentors should not be afraid to admit when they do not know something. Being a mentor is an opportunity to grow and learn.
- Mentors should encourage students to pursue their philosophical interests, develop their ideas, share them, and get feedback. Mentors should encourage promising students to speak up in class, and to share their ideas and work by saying things like, “You and your classmates will benefit from your talking and sharing your ideas in class.”
- Mentors can share writing samples and work from when they were just starting their philosophical careers. Doing so helps remind students that everyone must start somewhere.
- Mentors should share tips on how to cope effectively with stress, anxiety, and academic workloads.
- Mentors should set boundaries early and never flirt with mentees. Mentors need to be careful not to overstep professional boundaries, or to take advantage of power differentials. Similarly, those who are overseeing mentoring programs need to be mindful of the fact that not everyone will be a good mentor.
- Instead of making assumptions about one another, mentors and mentees should have a conversation about shared or differing identities.
- A good mentor will encourage students to find role models and to seek like-minded communities. Mentors should introduce mentees to other faculty members, graduate students, and undergraduates with whom they might have common interests or concerns.
- A mentor should not be afraid to have real conversations that might not be strictly on academic or career-related topics. A mentor should not just be a caricature of the mythical and infallible academic. On the other hand, mentors should be careful about sharing too much about department politics or criticizing other people in the department.

- Good mentors will not set their mentees up to feel like they are failing if they do not choose a path in academia. It is not the path for everyone, and mentees can and should consider many potential careers.
- Mentors should make it clear that the mentoring relationship can continue even after graduation. Mentors can encourage students to keep in touch and offer to write recommendation letters or provide other ongoing support.
- The mentoring relationship can be affected by factors such as the mentee's cultural mistrust (racial minority's feelings towards the facial majority) and stereotype threat. Again, cultural sensitivity on the part of the mentor is extremely important.
- Mentors should be aware of stressors for immigrant students: fear of deportation (of the mentee or the mentee's family), poverty, or the consequences of separation from parents or family.

### Important Note about Mandatory Reporting

The nature of a personal mentoring relationship will likely make the mentor a person of trust. As such, a mentee may share information that falls under mandatory reporting guidelines related to observed or suspected abuse (sexual or otherwise). A mentor should not discourage such conversations, but should always be clear with mentees about the boundaries of the mentor role. In some cases, faculty members are **required** to report certain information if it is disclosed to them, and it is important that mentees know about this requirement. Mentors ought to be familiar with campus requirements and procedures for such reporting and know the support that the campus provides for such issues.

### Discussion Scenarios

The following discussion scenarios will allow participants to follow a guided situation involving the mentorship skills discussed in this section. This optional activity may be more or less useful depending on the experience and style of discussion that facilitators and participants bring to the workshop.

### Busy Schedules

This scenario will aid in discussion of time constraints in a mentorship relationship.

*You have begun a mentorship relationship with your student. You had a few good meetings at the beginning of the term, but as mid-term approaches, you find yourself with a great deal of assignments to grade, tests to create, committee work to fulfill, etc. You see your mentee on campus one day, looking a little stressed out but brightening noticeably upon seeing you. Your mentee asks, "Can we meet this afternoon? I have some things on my mind and I think it would help to discuss them with you." You planned to devote your afternoon to making a dent in your mountain of work. How might you respond?*

One option is to drop everything and meet with the mentee. This is a matter of preference, but the mentor may need to consider personal boundaries around time. One strategy might be to try to dig a little deeper and see what the mentee wants to discuss. If it seems urgent, the mentor should endeavor to make the time to meet right away. If it can wait, the mentor might suggest meeting the next day or sometime that week. If it is not an emergency but is time sensitive (e.g., "I have a paper due on Wednesday and I'm freaking out and I don't think I can do it and I don't belong in college..."), the mentor should try to find a time to address the issue while it is still relevant without putting everything else on hold.

If the mentor first claims to have too much going on to meet that day, the mentee may feel less than important to the mentor, even if the mentor suggests meeting in the future. This response does not offer a concrete resolution and may feel disingenuous if the mentee does not know when the vague future meeting might occur. The mentee might feel discouraged from seeking help in the future when left waiting in a time of need. A better response would be to offer a concrete timeframe, whether that means determining a good time on the spot, or agreeing to email to set up a time to meet, *and then following through*.

Ideally, the mentor might say something like, “I really want to hear more and help you out if I can. Right now is a challenging time for me *as well*, so let’s find a time that works for us both.” It is important that a mentor is relatable and models that a successful professional may still struggle.

### A Special Event

This scenario will aid in discussion of cultural barriers and healthy boundaries.

*Going to the symphony is one of your favorite activities, so you have made it a tradition to take your mentees to the symphony as a treat at the end of the school year. You know that most students are on a tight budget, so you always pay for your mentees’ tickets and treat them to dinner. This year, when you make your usual invitation, your mentee seems uncomfortable and reluctant. Why might this be the case? Talk through a few possibilities, as well as ways you might improve the situation.*

Many people may never have been to the symphony before. The mentee may feel stressed by what to wear, or may feel embarrassed about not knowing what to expect. The mentee may prefer or need to do something else on a Friday night, such as work or attend a prior commitment. Due to power structures, the mentee might not feel free to turn down the invitation. Even if this is a special event to the mentor, the mentee should still be able to honor prior commitments.

Conversely, the mentee may go to the symphony on a regular basis. If the invitation sounds like an offer of “broadening horizons” that suggests that this would be a new experience for the mentee, the mentor may imply a judgement based on assumptions.

A good approach is be clear that the invitation is optional, and to appear open to any questions the mentee may have. For example, the mentor might say, “I often take my students to the symphony at the end of the semester. Not every student comes, but if you think you might be interested then I can provide you with more information. Does this event sound like something you would be interested in attending?” This proves to the student that there is an option to say no. This also allows the student to ease into the idea of attending, or to jump at the opportunity, depending on preference and experience.

## Graduate School Guidance

This section of the workshop offers a brief overview of the current state of graduate admissions in philosophy. The original “Mentoring the Mentors” Workshop included a panel discussion of directors of graduate admissions in philosophy. If facilitators are able to invite admissions committee members from both master’s and doctoral programs in philosophy, it can be very useful to have a conversation with people who know the landscape well. However, it is important to be aware that there is no “magic formula” for graduate admissions and that every program weighs various factors differently. This section ends with short narratives from graduate admissions committee members, which serve as an additional resource for facilitators and participants and will be particularly helpful for workshops that do not include a graduate admissions panel.

### Encouragement is Key

Students from marginalized identities tend to receive less praise and encouragement than other students. If students have potential to pursue philosophy at the graduate level, their mentors should be sure to communicate this to them. If students are early in their studies, they may not know that graduate study in philosophy is possible. Early conversations should be broadly informative and very encouraging, as the students need to believe in themselves first. It is important that mentors practice due diligence and not assume anyone else is encouraging their students.

At the same time, students should never feel that they are failing their mentors if they choose not to pursue graduate studies. There are many paths to success, but students may feel that they are letting down their mentors if they make a choice other than graduate studies in philosophy. Mentors should balance encouragement with the message that they support their mentees in whatever pursuits they choose.

### Be Realistic

Mentors should present a realistic picture of the prospects of a career in academic philosophy. Hiring remains slow as senior faculty defer retirement and administrators enact cuts and freezes. This means there are more people with advanced degrees in philosophy than there are academic positions (tenure-track or otherwise). Conversations with students about graduate school should address this reality.

Mentors cannot over-emphasize to their students that they could be great candidates for graduate study who have done everything right, and they just might get unlucky. Most programs have application numbers in the triple-digits, with correspondingly higher numbers of applicants for higher-ranked programs. Admissions offers are typically in the single digits. Mentors should encourage applicants to try again the following year if they continue to feel that graduate school in philosophy is the right path for them.

Since application fees often range from \$50 to \$100 and sending out official GRE scores costs an additional fee, the cost of applying to many schools quickly adds up. Many programs offer fee waivers, particularly in cases where the student comes from an underrepresented background (including low socio-economic status). Some programs may also be willing to accept unofficial GRE scores, with the contingency that the



student send official scores after acceptance. With these options in mind, a mentor might encourage students to apply as broadly as possible to increase their odds of getting accepted into a graduate program.

When it comes to further studies in any of the humanities, it is generally advised that students do not go into debt to pursue a graduate degree. Unlike business, law, and medicine, the prospects for high-paying jobs in the humanities do not justify taking on a large burden of debt. Indeed, most doctoral programs in philosophy will offer tuition remission and stipends to admitted students. It is worth noting that this is increasingly the case for master's programs as well as doctoral programs, especially those that have a strong record of sending their graduates on to PhD programs.

It is also worth noting that financial awards usually come with an expectation that the student will serve the department in some capacity, typically either as a teaching assistant or a research assistant. These assistantships are jobs, and students should be aware that the workload of a graduate student is on par with if not more demanding than a full-time job.

## Graduate Admissions Advice

For a panel session with graduate admissions committee members, the facilitator should give panelists advance notice of what they will be asked to discuss. For example, "What tips would you give to an undergraduate student from an underrepresented identity in philosophy to put forward the best application possible for your graduate program? What are some typical problems that you see in applications that you wish you could tell students to fix?" Some of the noteworthy answers given at previous workshops include the following:

- Some programs care a lot about "fit." They want to know whether the applicants will thrive given their particular interests and the types of things that faculty in the program actually teach or research.
- Sometimes faculty letters of recommendation never arrive or they arrive too late. This is common. This can make a big difference, so it pays to make sure that letter writers are prompt.
- Applications are hard to read. It is helpful to do things to stand out, such as writing an abstract before a writing sample, or pointing out prizes won.
- Students should make sure that writing samples and files are easy to read. Some online programs are very poorly designed and lose fonts or formatting. It is best to upload a whole pdf rather than fill in the blanks of a form.
- There are well-funded master's programs that are looking for students with non-traditional educational backgrounds. They tend to be small, and so students should think hard about fit and whether their interests will be served by going to a particular master's program.
- Personal statements should be informational. It is best to focus on interests and accomplishments and areas of potential growth rather than to point out specific faculty and what they study.

When the workshop does not have a panel on graduate admissions in philosophy, the following submissions written by current or former graduate admissions committee members provide in-depth information about the process. These particular programs were chosen for inclusion in this workshop

toolkit based on the responses to a survey of alumni of undergraduate diversity institutes in philosophy, in which they were asked which philosophy graduate programs they were either actively considering or had considered.

### University of Southern California: Mark Schroeder, Graduate Admissions Committee Member

Don't assume that graduate admissions is a unified process or that people are applying the same criteria at different institutions, within the same institution from year to year, or even across members of an admission committee in the same institution. Group decision-making is complicated.

Don't assume that the same criteria are applied to all writing samples. Different things should be expected of students with promise at different stages, and undergraduates are being compared side-by-side with students in their second MA program or applying as transfer PhD students. Just focus on bringing out a student's distinctive strengths. We're all looking for upside potential.

Admissions decisions are not about meeting some standard; they are comparative. One of the simplest most compelling decision rules is not to take a choice that is dominated by another choice, and that applies in graduate admissions as well. Applicants who are qualified in many ways can be overshadowed by other who profile in very similar ways, especially if there are several such applicants. Fortunately, this is less likely to happen to diverse applicants. Emphasize what is distinctive in the application.

GRE scores are not a very useful piece of information. In our application files, they show up on a random page of the file about seven pages in that has no other useful information on that page, and it is easy to scroll past them without noticing. I haven't been party to an admissions discussion where GRE scores carried a definitive role in twelve years, and the only one that I can remember led to making a bad decision.

It is easy to accommodate blemishes in an academic record when they are explained, so long as letter-writers express unreserved confidence. We have accommodated much more serious blemishes than a semester of bad grades many times.

One of the biggest places an applicant has the opportunity to make a difference is in their personal statement. This is not because personal statements carry great weight—on the contrary, most personal statements are so unhelpful that no systematic weight can be placed on personal statements. You can't write yourself out with a bad one. But you can in some cases write yourself in with a good one. Good personal statements reveal something personal about where an applicant's passion for philosophy came from and/or make a real case for fit with our departmental strengths and advising—usually one that is borne out by other features of the file. Cut-and-paste personal statements with name-dropping closing paragraphs are a no-no.

Departmental fit matters. We are committed to making sure that every student we admit has a path to a tenure-track or permanent position in philosophy if they choose to pursue it and stick it out. That means that we have to believe that we can help a student realize their potential. We have to see how a student

could thrive and be fulfilled at USC. And, of course, students with better fit are easier to recruit, and that matters for our decision, too.

No investment of time or effort from faculty members is too much. The more you invest, the richer and better-informed your letter, and the better guide you are to the process. Students from diverse marginalized backgrounds need this handholding process the most. You cannot invest too much in any stage, from advising about where to apply, to setting out a schedule for drafts of application materials, to double-checking every tailored personal statement from each department to help eliminate errors that betray ignorance. What you're doing is crucially important, and no one else can do it.

### University of Chicago: Jason Bridges, Diversity Liaison, Former Director of Graduate Admissions

What follows are a few thoughts and suggestions for applicants to philosophy graduate programs, drawn from my several years of serving on the admissions committee at the University of Chicago. Some of these observations may reflect practices that hold generally; some may be special to us.

1. Our aim is to identify candidates that we believe can flourish in our program and go on to successful careers as instructors and researchers in philosophy at colleges and universities.
2. We evaluate an application holistically, considering the various components en masse. No one element can secure admission; no one element can block it.
3. The most important elements for us are three: writing sample, recommendation letters, and philosophy-course grades. We regard these credentials as the best indicators of likely success in graduate school and beyond.
4. The writing sample is especially important. No student is admitted to our program whose writing sample hasn't been read by at least four of our faculty members.

Writing samples are typically derived either from course papers or from more substantial pieces of writing, such as BA or MA essays. It is usually easier to distill a writing sample out of a more substantial piece of writing than it is to build it up from a course paper--if only because a course paper will almost always be a product of less prior thought and effort. If you seek to turn a course paper into a writing sample, seek out as much feedback from instructors as you can on how to enrich its contents.

What we are looking for in a writing sample is not so much professional polish as it is evidence of potential for success in our program going forward. We're aware that applicants have diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from small colleges with tiny philosophy departments to MA philosophy programs at large universities. A strong writing sample will demonstrate that the applicant has taken the philosophy education they have thus far been afforded and used it as a basis to do their own preliminary, but still creative and serious-minded, explorations into topics of interest to them.

5. So far as is possible recommendation letters should come from philosophy faculty, not faculty in other disciplines, nor graduate students or others. If a letter writer has not had much personal contact with you,

ask politely if you might meet with them to talk about your interest in graduate school, your background in philosophy, philosophically-related work or activities in which you have engaged, and the like. The more individualized detail a letter writer can furnish, the stronger the letter will be.

6. The remaining elements of an application, while they cannot get a student admitted into our program, can play a role in a decision to reject an application. While high GRE scores are not a ground for admission, unusually low GRE scores may be treated as a red flag. The same goes for a low overall GPA. Again, we will contextualize these elements within the application as a whole.

7. One part of the application that may seem puzzling is the statement of purpose (SOP). What's it for? It's primary point is to reassure an admissions committee that you have had sufficient exposure to philosophy, and possess sufficient intellectual maturity, to plausibly commit to the long-term, challenging process of proceeding through a graduate program toward degree.

To this end, it's a good idea to give some accounting of what courses or topics have interested you thus far, and of how you might imagine those interests evolving. At the same time, however, members of philosophy admissions committees will be aware that students' interests change, often radically, after they arrive in graduate school. So it's important to articulate an interest in, and commitment to, the field as such. Avoid pegging your interest in graduate school to a super-specific topic (e.g., "My aim in pursuing a degree in Philosophy is to solve the Lottery Paradox.").

You can mention work of faculty at our department that you're excited about, but don't do this too narrowly. Your interest should be in the program, not in any particular individual.

Avoid fluff. This includes grandiose or unrealistic goals (e.g., "I believe that philosophy can change the world..."). And it includes clichéd, generic or college-application-y remarks (e.g., "I've always been fascinated by the big questions...").

Finally, the SOP is the best place to register and contextualize potentially damaging parts of your application: low grades during a semester in which you were beset by a personal crisis, low GRE scores for someone with test-taking anxiety, etc.

To take a particular kind of example of this, suppose an applicant has gone to a school that has provided for limited contact with philosophy faculty. Then she might write, say, "My college X is quite small, and as a result has a humanities department rather than a philosophy dept. One of my recommendation-letter writers teaches English rather than philosophy. But I should note that the course I took from her had such-and- such philosophical content. In general, I took all of the philosophy courses available to me, and have seized every opportunity to think about and pursue philosophical work afforded by X..." Or: "X is a very large state university, and several of my philosophy classes had hundreds of students. As I did not fully realize I wished to pursue graduate school in philosophy until my senior year, I did not seek out professors of my earlier courses for many face-to- face meetings. Since then, I have shared all relevant written work with those faculty and met with them to talk about my interest in pursuing a PhD...."

8. We are extremely interested in obtaining graduate classes with as much diversity as possible. in gender, in race and ethnicity, and otherwise. Diversity of membership is essential for the work of any community dedicated to humanistic inquiry, philosophy included. To this end, we employ procedures designed to control for unconscious bias and we engage in robust practices of recruitment.

9. A final observation. We do not require that an applicant already be well-trained in writing, reading and talking about philosophy. These are the aims of a graduate education. But we are looking for evidence of philosophical promise, and it is difficult for an application to reveal such promise if the candidate has not taken a substantial number of philosophy courses already. This is why it tends to be difficult to for a non-philosophy major get into a PhD program in philosophy straight out of college.

### **American University: Amy Oliver, Former Department Chair, Philosophy and Religion**

The faculty of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at American is majority female, and nationally we are one of the philosophy departments with the highest percentage of women faculty (of departments with a graduate program). We also have more faculty from underrepresented groups than average. Of seventeen full-time faculty, we have nine women, two of whom are Asian American, and two of whom are African American. Among our faculty are also those who count themselves as “sexual minorities.”

We take as part of our mission the goal of adding women and minority students to the PhD pipeline to help diversify the philosophy profession, whether from our BA or our MA program. Historically, about 10 percent of the African-American women in philosophy have come through American. We have also sent a substantial number of Latinx students and one Native American student to PhD programs. Also, my colleague, Ellen Feder, served a three-year term as director of PIKSI, the summer institute at Penn State, which informed a lot of students about our program. Since I work in Spanish and Latin American philosophy, I’ve also met a lot of prospective students who came to our MA program. Other faculty have reached out in additional ways.

In terms of our graduate admissions process, we contact as many women and students of color as we can identify and encourage them to apply. When students apply, we weigh a range of requirements (GPA, course work, recommendation letters, statement of purpose, resume, and GRE) with awareness that some women and minority students may fare less well on the GRE, for instance. We contact applicants to find out as much as we can about their needs, and their obstacles to pursuing an advanced degree. We seek means to provide as much support as we can, including funding to come visit the department, meet students and faculty, sit in on a class, etc. We try to maintain regular contact with applicants until they enroll, which frankly requires a great deal of time and commitment.

### **Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey: Martin Lin, Former Director of Graduate Admissions**

Admission to the graduate program at Rutgers, New Brunswick is the result of a holistic selection process. This means every aspect of your application potentially contributes to the outcome but it also means that no one detail in isolation entails rejection. For example, a bad philosophy grade or mediocre GREs can be

overcome by an excellent writing sample. The most important factors are fit, letters of recommendation, and the writing sample.

Of these three, the writing sample is the most important and we would encourage applicants to spend as much time as possible working on them. Be prepared to revise many times and get comments from as many people as possible. Use the best piece of writing you have, but it is also worth noting that the writing sample can affect perceptions of fit. If you want to work on philosophy of language but your sample is on Hegel's philosophy of law, this could create misperceptions regarding fit.

With respect to letters, it is important to get them from philosophy professors who know you well. As soon as you think you might want to go to grad school, identify potential letter writers. Ideally, they should be tenured or tenure track faculty. It also helps if your letter writers are active researchers. But the most important thing is that they know you well and think highly of you. Take as many classes with them as possible. Go to office hours. Let them get to know you as a student. Often students will have to make compromises. There may be a professor who is not tenure track but is a philosopher who knows you well and another professor who is tenured and an active researcher in a non-philosophy field. Which one do you ask? Unfortunately, there is no formula and every situation is different. In general, however, the following ranking is probably not too far off: (in order of importance) (1) knows you well and thinks highly of you; (2) philosopher; (3) active researcher and/or has visible profile in the profession; and (4) tenured or tenure track.

Although the writing sample can come into play, fit is assessed primarily on the basis of the statement of purpose. The statement of purpose is not primarily a narrative of how you came to philosophy and other such (admittedly interesting!) general facts about your character. Sometimes, however, background of this sort is relevant and worth noting. It is best to do near the beginning of the statement and do so succinctly so you can get on this the primary goal of the statement: a description of your intellectual profile. It should indicate what skills and knowledge you currently possess and what you want to do (or think you might want to do) in the future. It is also an opportunity to show that you can write in an informed way about several different areas of philosophy. Identify specific problems or methods that interest you. Mention specific faculty who might be able to help you.

### University of Oklahoma: Martin Montminy, Graduate Admissions Committee Member

We make a holistic assessment of an applicant that tolerates occasional lapses on their part. We take the student's improvement into consideration. For example, we may disregard bad grades during the first semester of college, if they are followed by good grades. We put most of the weight on grades in philosophy classes. We sometimes accept students who switched their majors, say from engineering to philosophy, and considerably improved their grades after the switch.

We no longer require GRE scores with graduate applications. (There are significant gaps in GRE performances by women and members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.)

(Regarding letters of recommendation when coming from a smaller department) This is the kind of thing the student should explain in their "statement of purpose". A letter from a non-philosopher is OK, if there

are also two informative letters from philosophers. I wouldn't ask a letter from a prof who doesn't know the student well. This might hurt their chances.

We put a lot of weight on writing samples (we read them!). We also consider areas: we don't want to have too many students working in the same fields and be supervised by the same small group of professors.

### **Pennsylvania State University: Leonard Lawlor, Director of Philosophy Graduate Studies**

Last year (applications for the 2019 doctoral student cohort), we made reporting the GRE scores optional. Not reporting the GRE scores will not negatively affect the quality of the application or the kind of financial package an applicant might receive from Penn State. Instead of the GRE scores, we take seriously (along with the GPA from previous degrees) all the qualitative factors, like letters of recommendation, writing sample, and the statement of purpose.

In relation to the writing sample, I would advise diversity students to submit, if possible, a philosophy paper, even if it concerns only critical philosophy of race. In fact, a writing sample, say, on Appiah would be very welcome and would be viewed positively. My experience has been that some (maybe the majority) of diversity applicants submit writing samples from other disciplines. This kind of writing sample is not viewed negatively, especially if it is well-done. However, it worries us about the applicant's interest in being in a philosophy program. Again, if possible, submit a philosophy paper. But, as is true for all applicants, what's best is to submit a strong paper, regardless of the discipline (or class) from which it comes.

Concerning the statement of purpose, the advice here is standard for all applicants. It is important to sound or appear mature, like you're ready to be in a doctoral program. More specifically for diversity applicants, if you are applying from non-philosophy disciplines, the statement is important for stressing the desire to be in a philosophy program. Like all philosophy doctoral programs, ours has a history of philosophy course requirement and comprehensive exams. We would like to be confident that anyone we admit can meet these degree requirements.

One distinctive thing about our philosophy doctoral program is the fact that we offer "dual-title" degrees. Dual-title degrees are those which certify that you are trained not only in philosophy but also in another discipline. Currently, we have dual-title degrees with African-American Studies and with Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Enrolling in one of the dual-title degrees usually enhances one's prospects on the academic job market. On our application form, there is a box to be checked if you are interested in these dual-title degrees.

On a more informal note, I think—at least for us—it is a good idea to contact the DGS (me in this case). I can provide guidance about preparing the application in the most positive way. Also, if the applicant sees that one of our faculty is on a conference program, I would advise the applicant not to be shy. He or she should try to go to the conference and speak with the PSU faculty member. This type of personal contact tends to pay off here.

One last thing is that we have tended to favor MA students for admissions. Receiving an MA in Philosophy is especially important for the applicants applying from other disciplines. But we regularly admit applicants who have only earned a BA, either in philosophy or in another discipline.

### New York University: Jessica Moss, Former Director of Graduate Admissions

We look at the whole application carefully, but recommendation letters and writing samples are the most informative parts.

Get recommendation letters from people who know you well from classes and have seen your work at its best.

If you have some low grades or GRE scores that are due to some special circumstance (e.g. you were sick one semester, or working a job, had family problems, or whatever), explain that in your personal statement and ask one of your recommenders to mention it too. (You don't necessarily have to go into lots of detail.)

Work hard on your writing sample and ask a professor to go over it with you and give you advice. It's almost always best to choose a paper that you got a good grade on for a college class (or one that you are working on now for a class and that your professor has seen a draft of and thinks is good), expanding it if it's too short.

There is usually no point in emailing the admissions director or other professors here asking for advice about your application, if you'd be a good candidate, if some particular professor would be interested in working with you, if you can come visit before you find out if you've been admitted, etc. We get more than 300 applications each year, and we think the fairest way to deal with them is for our admissions committee to take a careful look at each and every application on its own terms, without engaging in lots of communication with the applicants in other ways. That said, if there is a question you really want to ask that isn't answered on our website, you should of course give it a try!

I'm hesitant to generalize because we do admissions mostly by a small committee (although the whole faculty is involved in reading writing samples), so it really varies from year to year depending on who's on the committee. But in general I'd say that a few low grades, especially in non-philosophy classes, can be overlooked. A weak logic grade from someone who wants to specialize in a technical area of philosophy is a more worrisome than from someone who doesn't. GREs: most of our applicants get in the 80s and 90s (percentiles) for the verbal and quantitative. The written section scores vary wildly and we don't pay much attention to them. Weak scores in verbal or quantitative do worry us; it might be worth taking the test again if you think you can do better, and/or providing an explanation if there's a special circumstance that explains the low score.



## Wrapping Up

### Starting a formal mentoring program

At the end of the workshop, participants may feel motivated to take steps to address the lack of diversity in philosophy by starting a formal mentoring program at their home institutions. Consider the following questions before starting such a mentoring program:

- Will it be a mentoring program open to all students, or only students from underrepresented populations?
- Will student participation be voluntary?
- How many faculty members will serve as mentors? Will they rotate? Will all faculty serve as mentors? Will only those who have participated in this workshop serve as mentors?
- Will mentors and mentees be assigned? If so, by what process? Will pairs be random or assigned based on preferences?
- Will it start small? Will it start with students who newly declare the major, or will it consider all philosophy students at once?

Answering these questions will not be easy and will depend on the department and what its faculty feel capable of managing. It is best to start out small and create the program as a pilot. Organizers should solicit feedback from the participants as they build the program in order to learn how to improve it as it grows. Some individuals may want more information before they are comfortable developing a program. They should check whether their campus already has some form of mentoring program, including mentoring programs that specifically focus on diversity. Many STEM departments have already launched such mentoring programs, and it may be useful to contact them to compare notes.

Those interested in starting a comprehensive mentoring program may want to spend time engaging with their fellow faculty members to build interest and support before beginning. Another option, especially if a department is small, is to reach out to other departments on campus to think about creating a multi-disciplinary mentoring program. For example, one might consider building a humanities-wide mentoring program. The program may gain more administrative support with more departments involved.

A further possibility is creating a multi-campus mentoring program. That is, if there are other campuses with philosophy departments nearby, consider reaching out to discuss the possibility of mentoring across campuses. This kind of mentoring program could have many benefits, including helping mentees to develop a robust support network.

### Concluding Thoughts

The experience of running or attending a “Mentoring the Mentors” workshop can be both fruitful and exhausting. Conversations may have been cut short and questions left unanswered. If the organizers of the workshop are able to schedule a closing discussion, participants may be able to discuss those lingering thoughts or topics. The facilitator may use this time to go revisit workshop goals or put together a list of action items, or participants may take the open time to do a final reflection about what they learned.