Mentorship Conference/Working Group for Graduate Student Women in Philosophy

Abstract
The proposal is for a fourth workshop in an initiative begun in 2014 by Elizabeth Harman (Princeton), Elisabeth Camp (Rutgers) and Jill North (then Cornell). This is a recurring (every two years) mentorship workshop for women philosophy graduate students. 10-15 mentors and 35-50 graduate students gather to give and comment on papers and participate in advice sessions geared toward women in the philosophy profession. The 2020 conference will be held at Cornell in June 2020.

Basic Information
Project Coordinator(s)
Michelle Kosch

Steering Committee
Rachana Kamtekar (Cornell)
Janice Dowell (Syracuse)
Alison Peterman (Rochester)
Melissa Zinkin (SUNY Binghamton)

Funding Amount Requested
$5,000

Expected Project Completion Date
June 2020

Project Description
About 12–14 women faculty members will serve as mentors and about 35 women graduate students will attend as mentees. In addition, several additional faculty members from Syracuse, Rochester, and Cornell will be invited to attend; and about 30 additional participant spots will be reserved for graduate students from Syracuse, Rochester, and Cornell.

The workshop will be publicized in advance. In order for the workshop to work well, we will cap attendance and strive to have excellent papers discussed and talented graduate students in attendance. Students enrolled in philosophy PhD or DPhil programs will be encouraged to submit a short paper (maximum 7,000 words including notes and references) to be considered for participation at the workshop. 7 students will be chosen to have their papers discussed at the workshop. 14 students will be
chosen to present comments on the papers discussed. (2 commentators per paper). 14 more students will be selected to participate as chairs of the sessions. (There will be two chairs of each session: one to keep track of time limits and the other to call on people.) All participants in the workshop, including mentees and mentors, will be required to read all seven papers to be discussed at the workshop in advance of the workshop. We will encourage submitted papers to be accessible to a broad audience.

In addition to seven sessions at which substantive philosophy will be discussed, we will hold five sessions in which advice is offered. This will be advice that might be offered to any graduate students; it will not be geared toward women in particular. The topics will include: looking ahead to the job market from early in graduate school; conference participation; giving talks; publishing; dissertation writing; teaching; managing the first year of a tenure-track position; managing work-life balance. Each advice panel will be made up of several mentors-at-large.

All mentors will be recruited well enough in advance that their names can be included as part of the publicity for the workshop. (The organizers will also serve as mentors.) Mentors’ duties will be: to read submitted papers and assist us in selecting the program papers and participants from among those who submit; to read all 7 papers in advance of the workshop; to attend the workshop; and to be on some of the advice panels. Mentors are mentors-at-large; they will not be matched up with particular mentees, and they will not have specific duties after the workshop. But we will communicate to mentors that they should expect that some mentees will contact them for professional advice periodically after the workshop. Follow-up surveys of mentors and mentees have been conducted after each workshop, and we plan to do the same, to gauge the success of the workshop and to improve future workshops.

**Project Impact**

Philosophy as a discipline has a low percentage of women. Roughly 22 percent of philosophy faculty in the top fifty U.S. PhD programs are women. Less than 30 percent of 2009 philosophy PhDs in the U.S. went to women; philosophy has the lowest percentage of women PhDs among all humanities fields, and lower than many fields of science. Because there are so few women in philosophy, women philosophy graduate students and faculty sometimes face unique problems. They may receive less mentorship; they may become more discouraged. Sometimes they leave the profession or they do not work up to their full potential. Because philosophy has so few women, losing any of them (or losing their best work) is a serious loss for the profession.

Graduate students involved in past workshops have said:

‘Attending the workshop was one of the most exciting experiences in my graduate school career.’

‘The workshop gave me the confidence to feel like I could make it in this profession.’

‘The workshop had a profound influence on me. Perhaps for the first time I really believed that I could make it in this profession.’

‘The workshop was an extraordinary experience. . . . the discussions were simply the best time I’ve had doing philosophy, ever.’

‘It was a transformative experience, I was glowing from it for a week.’
‘It was the most interesting and fruitful workshop that I have ever attended.’

‘I learned an incredible amount philosophically, professionally, and personally.’

‘I plan to put myself out there more and not worry about what others may think of my questions.’

‘In three years in graduate school it was my first time asking a question at a talk attended by faculty. It was my first time having such candid discussions with faculty members about their struggles in the profession.’

‘I was not worried about deflecting unfair criticism or harassment, because I felt safe.’

‘The workshop reassured me that I can be part of a nurturing philosophical community, whether or not I find it at my home institution.’

‘The workshop has made me realize more concretely the power of women when we work together and support each other. It has also made me see what philosophy can potentially be—that it’s possible to do rigorous work in an environment that is not threatening or hostile.’

‘This workshop has bolstered my confidence in the fact that women in general have a place in the philosophy profession and the feeling that I, in particular, belong.’

Project Goals
Connect women graduate students with older women professors in mentoring relationships.

Give women graduate students an opportunity to present work and comment on one another’s work in a supportive climate.

Provide advice specifically tailored to the profession and and personal issues connected with being a woman in philosophy.

Project Timeline
Timeline:
April 15, 2019: Sign contract for accommodation at Cornell dormitories. Send invitations to mentors-at-large.

Before October 2019: Post call for submissions.

January 5, 2020: Paper submission deadline.

Late February 2020: Notify selected graduate students so that they can plan their travel.

June 16–19, 2020: Workshop

Project Outreach
Audience: graduate students in the philosophy profession.

Advertising: open call for papers posted on PhilEvents and circulated to departments.
Accessibility Plan
Cornell’s Office of Disability Accommodation will ensure that support is provided for students and mentors with disabilities.

Evaluation Plan
Follow-up surveys of mentors and mentees have been conducted after each workshop in the series, and we plan to do the same, to gauge the success of the workshop and to improve future workshops.

Online Presence
The project will have a website maintained on the Cornell server.

Budget Narrative
In the case of each budget item, we estimated costs based on cost per participant for the three previous workshops.

Other Funding Sources
Cornell University, Department of Philosophy and other units: $12,000
SUNY Binghamton, Department of Philosophy and other units: $6,000
Syracuse University, Department of Philosophy and other units: $6,000
University of Rochester, Department of Philosophy and other units: $6,000
Princeton University, Department of Philosophy and other units: $5,000
Rutgers University, Department of Philosophy: $5,000
The Marc Sanders Foundation: $10,000
The Mellon Foundation: $5,000