Tools for Philosophers Pursuing Non-Academic Careers

Abstract
The immediate aim of this project is to develop a resource that helps Philosophers identify employment opportunities commensurate with their skills and education as well as translate their work, skills, and experiences, especially as PhDs, into a narrative that is legible to a broader audience. We believe the latter will help with the former, since it is difficult to identify which employment opportunities we are qualified for without identifying what qualifications we have. In addition, we aim to identify a network of non-academic Philosophers around which we can build a professional community of mentors and collaborators. We will take special care to document skills, resources, mentors, and communities that benefit marginalized Philosophers who have been crowded out of the profession.

Basic Information
Project Coordinator(s)
Sherri Lynn Conklin

Steering Committee
N/A

Funding Amount Requested
$5,000

Expected Project Completion Date
June 2023

Project Description
The purpose of this project is to develop a resource for Philosophers pursuing careers outside of academia. We start by recognizing that many such resources already exist. For example, in 2016, the APA published Beyond Academia: Professional Opportunities for Philosophers. Further, the Beyond Academia resource page was updated in 2021. These comprehensive materials provide a wealth of information about non-academic career pathways for Philosophers and is undoubtedly a great starter resource when a Philosopher is considering alternatives to academia. However, any document with such breadth will inevitably lack many of the concrete details needed for bridging the gap when transitioning out of academia. The immediate aim of this project is to develop a resource that helps Philosophers identify employment opportunities commensurate with their skills and education as well as translate their work, skills, and experiences, especially as PhDs, into a narrative that is legible to a broader audience. We believe the latter will help with the former, since it is difficult to identify which employment opportunities we are qualified for without
identifying what qualifications we have. This project will take special care to document skills, resources, mentors, and communities that benefit marginalised philosophers who have left the profession.

A guest post on Daily Nous argues that we need three things to adequately support PhDs for non-academic careers (http://dailynous.com/2016/06/09/duties-to-graduate-students-pursuing-non-academic-careers-guest-post-by-torsten-menge/): (1) faculty members who are informed about these careers, (2) departments providing tangible support to students, and (3) a change in the graduate curriculum to better prepare students for futures outside academia. We propose to provide resources to move toward better supporting graduate students and to begin to address this guest post's first two demands. We will create resources which faculty members can use to learn how to better support their graduate students and to which faculty members can refer their students. Additionally, we will determine what resources graduate students want to provide departments. We hope to offer tangible support by setting up a network of non-academic Philosophers.

For now, our target audience will be ABDs and recent PhDs, but we will eventually tailor resources for BAs and career academics. In this application, we use “PhDs” to broadly refer to our target audience.

METHODOLOGY:

To develop these resources, we begin by recognizing that Philosophy PhDs who are transitioning out of academia are 1) experienced, 2) mid-career professionals and 3) content experts.

1) In terms of experience, Philosophy PhDs are laborers who work 40+ hours each week. At work, we perform numerous tasks. The first step is to begin individuating, quantifying, and documenting specific concrete tasks we perform while working. For example, we don’t just teach. We organize information. We make that information accessible to non-experts by breaking down specialized language. We present that information to a group. And so on. Once we identify specific tasks, we will examine a range of job ads and categorize these tasks under the broader employment qualifications, such as “good communication skills,” “experience presenting to an audience,” etc. This will give us both concrete skills Philosophers can discuss in job interviews, as well as a method for assessing our qualifications for a particular job.

Our methodology is broadly based on a tool called the "Job Description Analysis," created by Jared Redick of The Resume Studio (https://www.theresumestudio.com/). For the last five years, Redick has been working with the UC Humanities Research Institute to tailor his methodology to work specifically with Humanities PhDs, and the Program Coordinator on this grant has worked directly with Redick in using these tools. We will further tailor this methodology for Philosophers and make it available for individual Philosophy PhDs to use for identifying their own qualifications and job prospects.

2) As mid-career professionals, Philosophy PhDs have cultivated habits, skills, and other professional practices that help us succeed as academics. While many of these practices effectively translate to other employment sectors, many inevitably will not and will, instead, be
counterproductive. Philosophy, for example, is notoriously jargon heavy, and we are renowned for being pedantic (https://urlzs.com/ZcrHd). Neither go over well in conversation with non-Philosophers. Moreover, Philosophy PhDs lack many skills that would help us succeed in other employment sectors. To identify what works, what does not, and what is needed, we will begin by analysing the wealth of existing interviews already collected by, for example, the folks at freerangephilosophers.com, Eleni Manis at philskills.com, and Helen De Cruz at doingthingswithphilosophy.com. After analysing the existing interviews, we will develop questions for our focus groups, 3 to be held over Zoom or another video conferencing tool, to find answers to questions not already addressed in existing interviews and to further explore any valuable insights that could be examined more in-depth. We will take care to invite members of groups that have been historically marginalised in philosophy to participate in these focus groups, in order to provide more comprehensive career resources for similarly identifying individuals who are currently considering careers beyond the academy – whether by choice or necessity. After conducting our focus groups, we will create a general survey including the most helpful, revealing, or unanswered questions that we will distribute to the broader philosophical community in order to access additional data. After analysing all of our findings, we will hopefully be able to create industry or job-specific profiles for successfully competing for non-academic employment as a Philosopher.

3) As content experts, Philosophy PhDs are loathe to abandon work on our areas of specialization. Yet, most employers are not interested in the specific topics of our research, even if they are interested in us as researchers. In the course of conducting surveys and focus groups, as well as in analysing existing interviews, we will look to identify ways in which Philosophers incorporate their content expertise into their non-academic employment. In addition, we will collaborate to think more broadly about how specific topics and specializations in Philosophy connect to different industries starting with consideration for the kinds of jobs and industries Philosophers tend to find themselves in. For one example of how we will approach this question, we wonder whether content expertise in Epistemology can be connected to any specific jobs in the (social) media industry, when alternative facts are a focus of public discourse. We hope to develop strategies that will help Philosophy PhDs make these connections, so that they can conduct focused job searches where their expertise will be valued in non-academic settings.

Finally, the three deliverables we have identified so far are largely aimed at creating practical tools for Philosophers pursuing non-academic careers. However, we have identified an additional, more holistic, resource that would benefit Philosophers leaving academia. A recent series of focus groups, conducted by the UC Humanities Research Institute, revealed that Humanities PhDs who leave academia often miss being a part of a community of scholars and wish they had access to peer-reviewed journals in their field, so that they could continue their research as independent scholars. As a part of the long-term plan for our project we aim to identify and potentially build a professional organization around the network of non-academic Philosophers we identify in the course of building our tools. A further goal is to create a mentorship program, such as the one administered by The Job Candidate Mentoring Program for Women in Philosophy (https://jobmentoringforwomen.wordpress.com/), for Philosopher pursuing careers outside of academia. This long-term goal will of creating a professional organization and developing a
mentoring program will, of course, be the subject of future grant proposals to the APA or other funding sources and is not within the purview of the current project.

The results of our project will be made publicly available online and advertised through established Philosophy organizations and communication outlets (details below). In addition, we will publicize our results with other major organization in the humanities, such as the MLA, AHA, as well as the UC Humanities Research Institute, which is affiliated with the Mellon funded Connected Academics initiative and other related initiatives.

We request $5,000 in funds for supporting the Project Coordinator to conduct an analysis of existing interviews with non-academic philosophers, to conduct three focus groups, and to build and host the project website.

**Project Impact**

We’ll start with an anecdote. In 2016, a talented woman, with Hispanic heritage, graduated with her B.A. in Philosophy. After 3 years of on-and-off work and many harrowing interviews, she constructed an appealing narrative about the value of her Philosophy degree. Today, she is working at a company manufacturing medical devices. Her starting salary as an introductory level employee was $75,000 per year, and she is now making nearly $100,000 per year a mid-level management. She works from home and has a great deal of control over her schedule. The work is engaging and challenging, and she is required to develop her skill set in order to advance in the company. She is a clear non-academic Philosophy success story.

Satisfied with her increasing financial stability and an abundance of free time, she has considered applying to PhD programs within the next few years. At a public university like UCSB, she could pay for her tuition out-of-pocket (at $12,000 per year). She could pursue her research without teaching and, because she is not interested in academia, a lack of teaching experience would not count against her on the job market.

She has considered continuing her degree in Philosophy and is positioned to do what many of us dream of doing - pursue Philosophical research and inquiry simply because she loves it. However, she has concerns. First, she is worried that she would have difficulty finding an advisor who would take her seriously, since she is not interested in working in academia. Second, she has noticed that PhD recipients who leave academia are rarely mentioned on department websites, and she is worried that her department and her colleagues would therefore see leaving academia as a failure. Third (and most importantly for her), she worries that other philosophers will not see her as a real philosopher if she chooses to forego academia. She loves Philosophy and Philosophers, and she is concerned that she will be ostracized by the Philosophical community. She wonders if, instead, she should pursue a graduate degree in a different area – one that is more applied or one that is closer to her present career prospects, where her choices would be more legible. Even so, she says she will always feel drawn to Philosophy. If only things were different.

This talented woman of color is representative of many women of color that take Philosophy classes across the country. These students are motivated and engaged by Philosophy coursework.
Many would love to pursue PhDs and could do so competitively, but they have no real interest in academia, so, instead, they go elsewhere.

If we can develop resources that help Philosophers compete for and successfully gain non-academic employment commensurate with their skills and education, we could improve diversity and inclusion within Philosophy. We believe we can help change the perception of the value of such work from the standpoint of the profession, improving conditions for individuals, such as those mentioned above. Moreover, we believe we can change the perception of the value of Philosophy from the standpoint of those outside of academia. Both are essential to creating a more inclusive discipline.

Philosophy has long been perceived as insufficiently applied and insufficiently lucrative to take seriously as a major. A Philosophy degree does not come with clear career prospects. Documenting: 1) the sorts of jobs non-academic Philosophers get; 2) how Philosophers get these jobs; and 3) how the Philosophy degree assists in successfully competing and performing in these jobs will help make Philosophy a more attractive major to a broader range of students – especially low-income and first generation students who cannot afford to take risks when making choices about their long-term financial stability. Further, understanding how to duplicate success stories like the one above is essential to growing the discipline in a national climate as hostile to the Humanities (and Philosophy in particular) as the one we live in now.

In addition, by expanding our understanding of career prospects for individuals with Philosophy degrees, especially PhDs, and how these individuals put their Philosophical skills to use, we will be able to better and more inclusively define what counts as a successful career trajectory for a Philosopher. As shown above, this could help attract individuals to pursue graduate degrees in Philosophy who worry that the department, their colleagues, and the discipline as a whole will ostracize them or fail to take them seriously as Philosophers.

We might also find that Philosophy is a more diverse discipline than it initially seems. When we talk about diversity in Philosophy, we universally talk about diversity in academic Philosophy and the academic pipeline problem. We worry that members of marginalized groups fall out of Philosophy and disappear. Yet, these individuals, with their Philosophical training, pursue lucrative careers in different sectors. While the pipeline problem in academic Philosophy is a problem, we deny ourselves the benefit of the broad range of existing voices in the discipline by denying that those voices exist. If we can be better at supporting, acknowledging, and collaborating with those who forego academic Philosophy and pursue alternative careers, we can create spaces for them inside and alongside academic settings - showing that we value them as Philosophers and showing potential Philosophy degree seekers that the discipline has room for them wherever they land.

**Project Goals**

- Before creating this proposal, we reached out to alumni from our PhD programs who had gone into industry. They were bitter about the lack of support from departments and about how PhDs are often told in industry interviews that their graduate school experience does not count. One alumnus stated: “From what I’ve seen, companies care about your experience (again, quantifiable results). Your WORK experience. Grad school doesn’t count.
You can try to finagle things about being a TA, pitch it as leadership experience, etc, but that won’t fool a lot of people.” Aside from formal training in logic and critical thinking, Philosophers are not typically trained on how to clearly and concretely articulate what we do, why it matters, and why it is useful to other people. As a result, Philosophers have difficulty convincing employers that graduate school provides transferable skills and useful experience, and many Philosophy PhDs start in the same entry-level positions as employees without graduate degrees. No wonder non-academic employment is often perceived as less desirable from inside the Philosophy profession.

- We need to learn how to compete for employment commensurate with our education and skills. We propose to identify and create resources for assisting Philosophers in translating their work, skills, and experiences, especially as PhDs, into a narrative that is legible to a broader audience and use this information to find work they are qualified for.

- Although the APA has previously sponsored research on Non-Academic Job Placement, we have little information specifically analysing how Philosophers leverage their degrees in the interview process. We do not know what skills they highlight, how they relate their Philosophical work to the work they will do with the potential employers, or what the employers find attractive about job candidates with Philosophy degrees. In addition, we do not know how a Philosophy degree assists in performing a non-academic job. We do not know which Philosophical skills are useful and which ones get in the way for different kinds of non-academic jobs. We do not know what kinds of skill gaps exist, for which Philosophy degree seekers could gain additional training prior to considering non-academic jobs. We propose to begin documenting and analysing this information in order to help Philosophy job seekers to understand their strengths and weaknesses prior to pursuing employment outside of academia. We aim to help Philosophy job seekers to identify which industries Philosophers are most well-suited for (and not just what jobs we get), and we aim to identify what resources Philosophers most need when transitioning out of academia into these careers. We will do this by conducting surveys and focus groups of our own, as well as analysing existing interviews with a focus on identifying specific skills, experiences, and narratives that help Philosophers gain employment.

- As we noted in the Project Description, there is a clear need for creating networking opportunities for non-academic Philosophers. They can support each other and provide mentoring when pursuing careers outside of academia, and they can better pool scholarly resources in order to continue conducting research as independent scholars. We aim to begin building the bridges to create these opportunities. If we are successful, we further hope to begin building pipelines into non-academic industries, as a long-term goal, using our professional networks as resources in the same way other disciplines do.

- PhDs pursuing non-academic careers often lack support from their their faculty advisor(s) and mentor(s) because, quite often and unsurprisingly, they lack experience outside academia. However, this is a real problem since there are not enough academic jobs for all PhDs. Thus, PhDs end up without much of the career counseling they desperately need. Some places, like UCI, have a dedicated career counselor to supplement academic advice from advisors/mentors. However, UCI only has one graduate career counselor for almost 5,7000 graduate students in all disciplines. We aim to educate the philosophical community
about non-academic career prospects for philosophers so that advisors/mentors can better advise their graduate students and provide resources with which students can educate themselves.

- Finally, we hope that by destigmatizing non-academic careers by helping Philosophers gain access to challenging & engaging work that is commensurate with their skills and experiences, we can destigmatize Philosophy. Philosophers are talented professionals who could be successful in a broad range of industries - if only we knew best how to engage with them effectively. By changing the perception of Philosophy as a lucrative major that engages with people from different sectors, we hope to make Philosophy a more diverse and more inclusive discipline that can attract a broader range of potential participants.

**Project Timeline**

The funded phases of this project will take place between January 01 2022 and June 2023.

2022

**JANUARY:**
- Collect existing interviews with non-academic Philosophers from various sources online
- Identify three colleagues to help verify the qualitative results of interview coding in early stages of the project
- Document concrete tasks performed while working (Jan. - May)

**FEBRUARY:**
- Begin analysis of interviews with non-academic Philosophers (Feb. - April)
- Check for inter-rater reliability with previously identified colleagues (Feb. 15)

**MARCH:**
- Prepare questions for focus groups (Feb. - June)
- Document strategies for identifying concrete work activities & create shareable resource

**APRIL:**
- Prepare write-up on interviews with non-academic Philosophers
- Recruit participants for focus groups (around 30 participants, up to 10 per meeting)

**MAY:**
- Analyse job ads & categorize work activities (May - August)

**JUNE:**
• Document methodology & create resource for analysing job ads & categorizing work activities

• Focus Group 1

JULY:

• Focus Group 2

AUGUST:

• Prepare write-up for analysis of job ads & categorized work activities

• Focus Group 3

SEPTEMBER:

• Analyse focus group responses (Sep. - Nov.)

• Prepare on-line survey

OCTOBER:

• Distribute survey - include question about interest in participating in non-academic philosopher network & possibility of mentoring

NOVEMBER:

• Create project website (Nov. - Jan.)

DECEMBER:

• Analyse survey (Dec. - Feb.)

• Create list of non-academic philosophers interested in networking & mentoring

• Obtain feedback on drafts of resources from non-academic Philosophers on our list

2023

JANUARY:

• Revise resources in-light of feedback

FEBRUARY:

• Make resources available online

• Update resources using survey responses

MARCH:
• Submit key findings & links to resources to APA blog

• Invite the APA Committee on Non-Academic Careers to adapt practical components of the project for the APA Beyond Academia website and to present findings through an APA On Demand webinar

• Advertise project, resources, & website to Philosophical community

• Contact non-academic philosophers interested in networking & mentoring about how to proceed with creating a professional network

APRIL:

• Work with MAP & relevant APA committees to present findings at 2023 Pacific APA

MAY:

• Evaluate the accessibility of resources

JUNE:

• Revise resources

• Final Report

Project Outreach
We will initially tailor our resources for Philosophy ABDs and recent PhDs, but we will eventually tailor resources for BAs and career academics. Even so, we believe the resources we create will have use to any group of Philosophers, since we will make our methods available as a resources. We will publish our findings on project website. We will share links to these resources on social media, and various blogs including Daily Nous and the APA blog. We will especially focus on sharing this work within the MAP community. In addition, we will advertise our work to individual departments offering graduate degrees. Finally, we will hold career workshops on our campuses, and we aim to share our results at the 2023 Pacific APA.

Accessibility Plan
We will make all resources produced by the project available online. We recognize that website accessibility impacts many people, including those with Visual Disabilities, those with Mobility/Motor/Dexterity Disabilities, those who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, and those with Cognitive Disabilities.

We are working with an experienced and ethical web designer for implementing our online products. All online documents, websites, and other web-based materials will be created using the most up-to-date ADA Standards for Accessible Design:
https://www.ada.gov/2010ADAstandards_index.htm
In addition, we will use the following resource for checking conformity with these and other UI design best practices: https://github.com/jsx-eslint/eslint-plugin-jsx-a11y

Further, these products will utilize Google material design best practices guidelines: https://material.io/design/guidelines-overview

The online Focus Groups will occur over Zoom or a relevantly similar technology. The Project Coordinator will be in contact with participants to learn about needed accommodations prior to holding the Focus Group and is committed to implementing video conferencing best practices such as those noted in the following:

https://www.colorado.edu/accessible-technology/resources/zoom-accessibility-best-practices

https://www.library.virginia.edu/services/accessibility-services/media-accessibility-resources/zoom-best-practices/

utilize Facilities used for focus groups and graduate career workshops will be wheel chair accessible. We will offer accommodations to all individuals interested in participating in our programming. We have access to independent funds for ensuring accessibility to visual or hearing impaired participants during these events.

**Evaluation Plan**

Measure 1: Did we produce the 3 resources discussed in the proposal?

Measure 2: Did we begin the process of creating a professional community for non-academic Philosophers?

Measure 3: Did we obtain feedback on our resources from non-academic Philosophers who currently have jobs?

Measure 4: How did we revise our resources in light of their feedback?

Measure 5: Do PhDs find these materials useable and self-explanatory?

Measure 6: How did we revise our resources in light of their feedback?

Measure 7: How many people visit our website and access our resources?

Measure 8: Is this consistent with the number of people Jennings & the APA report as ultimately obtaining employment outside of academia?

Measure 9: If not, how did we make sure the materials were more broadly accessible?

**Online Presence**

The resources produced by our project will be hosted on a project website. The website will be advertised via a number of online media outlets. We will host a forum - either via blog or web form - for philosophers to provide feedback on the materials or share stories about pursuing non-
academic careers. In the long run, we will also manage a mentoring program, on this website, for individuals pursuing non-academic employment.

**Budget Narrative**

**RESEARCH STIPEND: $4000.00**

The Project Coordinator will receive a nominal $4000.00 stipend for conducting research and engaging in outreach on behalf of the project.

**WEBSITE: $635.00**

A $500.00 stipend will be paid to our web designer & technical consultant Michael Nekrasov (CS PhD). Domain name is $45.00 @ $15.00/yr x 3 years (which we believe will be a enough time for us to identify long-term support for the website). We have access to free web hosting through Netlify.

Estimate Source:
godaddy.com

**FOCUS GROUP HONORARIA: $300.00**

We hope to include 5 participants in each of the three focus groups. Each participant will receive a nominal $20.00 stipend, in the form of a gift card, for contributing to our project.

Because we will be asking busy colleagues to meet with us after they spend the day working, we would like to provide honoraria for participating in the FG. We request $300.00 @ $20.00 per person x 5 people per FG x 3 FG.

**SUPPLIES: $65.00**

$65.00 for expenses relating to printing, writing materials, mailing etc. (estimate based on past experience & assessment materials we have in-hand)

We note that we would be willing to accept any portion of the above funding for initiating this project. Even with partial funding from the APA, we could use this of evidence of the project’s value while pursuing funds from our university and other sources.

**Other Funding Sources**

None at present.