# Mentor Observation Program (MOP) for Small Philosophy Departments: An APA Seed Grant Proposal

## Abstract

Faculty in small philosophy programs often lack access to effective feedback about teaching. Such feedback may come from faculty in other departments who are not familiar with prevailing practices for teaching philosophy, or from a very limited number of philosophy colleagues. We plan to offer faculty in small departments two semesters of support from mentors trained by the American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT). The mentor would remotely observe early-career faculty (tenure-track, visiting, lecturer, and adjunct or contingent) and provide structured feedback. Mentees would develop pedagogical tools to improve their teaching and have the opportunity to discuss their teaching with colleagues outside of their institution.

## Basic Information

### Project Coordinator(s)

Jack D. Musselman, David Gray

### Steering Committee

- AAPT Past President Emily Esch (College of St. Benedict MN)
- AAPT Executive Director Alexandra Bradner (Kenyon College OH)
- AAPT Teaching and Learning Committee Chair Kimberly Van Orman (University of Georgia GA)

### Funding Amount Requested

$4,000.00

### Expected Project Completion Date

August 2026

## Project Description

MOP serves two main purposes: to (1) improve the teaching of philosophy and (2) provide a community of practice for philosophers in small departments. (By "small departments" we mean one- or two-person departments.) In these two ways, MOP advances the APA's stated mission to support "the professional development of philosophers at all levels" and advances "greater understanding and appreciation of the value of philosophical inquiry."

The first purpose of MOP is to improve the teaching of philosophy by providing effective pedagogical feedback to philosophers in small departments. It is our anecdotal experience that instructors in such departments frequently lack such feedback. The possible reasons are varied: (1) In many small departments, much of the teaching is performed by adjuncts and contingent faculty, who cycle in and out of the department and do not have time to take advantage of campus teaching centers; (2) Institutions with

small departments are often resource-starved and may not have formal observation and mentoring programs; (3) Instructors in small departments may not have faculty colleagues who are qualified to effectively assess the teaching of philosophy; or (4) When a department is small, colleagues are reluctant to provide critical feedback to one another that may, at best, weaken their working relationship or, at worst, threaten their close colleague's career. Institutions that face any one of these challenges would benefit as MOP will offer effective feedback for philosophy instructors who would otherwise lack such valuable information.

The second purpose of MOP is to provide a community of practice for philosophers in small departments. This is done by pairing such a philosopher with an experienced philosophy mentor trained by the American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT). Involvement in a community of practice is essential to faculty in smaller departments, who often feel disconnected from the field in general while also fearing that their job, or even their whole department, is on the chopping block.

MOP provides that community and addresses these concerns. In addition to offering pedagogical feedback, the experienced philosophy mentor will provide their mentee with strategic advice for how to demonstrate the vital role of philosophy departments and philosophical study to administrators at their institution.

The AAPT's Teaching and Learning Committee will help to administer MOP. This long-standing committee consists of ten members who organize a variety of seminars and workshops on philosophy pedagogy. The Steering Committee includes AAPT Past President Emily Esch (College of St. Benedict MN), AAPT Executive Director Alexandra Bradner (Kenyon College OH), and AAPT Teaching and Learning Committee Chair Kimberly Van Orman (University of Georgia GA), alongside the MOP's coordinators and authors of this MOP proposal, Jack Musselman (St. Edward's University TX) and David Gray (University at Buffalo NY)--all of whom are themselves experienced teachers. The Steering Committee will identify the mentors for MOP while supervising their overall progress with their mentees. Housing this pilot program within the Teaching and Learning Committee will allow for a smooth transition if the pilot program is a success and adopted as a permanent part of AAPT's programming.

The AAPT is the only existing organization suited to take on a project like MOP. The AAPT has extensive experience in teacher training. For over twenty-five years, we have been training new philosophy instructors at our biennial workshop-conferences with a four-day Teaching and Learning Workshop. From these experiences the AAPT has developed a one-day Teaching and Learning workshop that it has offered around the country since 2011. Since 2014, the AAPT has run two to three one-day workshops a year. In order to do this, the AAPT has developed a protocol for training facilitators, and it now has over a dozen philosophers around the country that can run a one-day Teaching and Learning Workshop.

MOP is a natural extension of all this. The faculty mentors chosen for the pilot would be expected to work together to develop a standard template for the program. For example, AAPT's Teaching and Learning Workshops focus on three pillars of course design, but, within this basic framework, facilitators are free to choose what they do, and they work together to design a distinct agenda for each workshop. MOP would share a basic structure in terms of content and activities, but with enough flexibility to make the program work for a wide range of different teaching personalities and teaching conditions. Once that template is finalized, the AAPT will implement an "observer training" similar to what it does with its Teaching and Learning facilitators. That way, the AAPT will have a reliable pool of trained observers from which it can draw each year.

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The AAPT will share, at a national level and via a variety of mediums, the lessons and best practices learned through MOP. More than 100 philosophers attend the AAPT's biennial workshop-conferences, and the AAPT interacts with hundreds more through the AAPT-APA Teaching Hubs at the three divisional APA meetings. The AAPT also publishes the AAPT Studies in Pedagogy, a peer-reviewed journal on teaching and learning in philosophy. Furthermore, the AAPT's Virtual Programming Committee is using online tools to expand the AAPT's reach with philosophy teachers who cannot travel. All this provides the AAPT with well-established infrastructure for reaching a wide variety of audiences that would be extremely receptive to the mission and results of MOP.

MOP fits seamlessly into the AAPT's strategic plan: First and foremost, MOP's cross-institutional mentoring model explicitly embodies the AAPT's core commitment to building a community of practitioners. By reaching out to philosophy faculty in small departments, MOP also adheres to the AAPT's core value of inclusive practice. In addition, MOP is aligned with all four pillars of the AAPT's mission statement, which seek to promote (1) pedagogy and teaching excellence, (2) professional partnerships and networks, (3) mentoring and training, and (4) research and the scholarship of teaching and learning. As a result, the AAPT has a vested interest in the success of MOP.

**Timeline**

Spring 2025: Steering Committee recruits five experienced AAPT faculty members as mentors. Under the direction of the Steering Committee the five mentors work on the application form for mentees and develop the template for the yearlong program

Summer 2025: the call for applicants is sent out and the AAPT Steering Committee reviews proposals and matches senior faculty with mentees in small departments

Fall 2025: start of MOP program (first pre-surveys and then Zoom teaching observation with one meeting before and one after the observation)

Spring 2026: end of MOP program: Report due to the Steering Committee in May. Steering Committee in consultation with the Teaching and Learning Committee decides whether to run MOP again in 2026-2027.

Summer 2026: Assessment of the MOP program (pre- and post-surveys, debriefing with the five mentors by the Steering Committee, revisions made to the program, cycle may start again)

August 2026: MOP report to APA Board for their November meeting.

Each of the five faculty mentors would be paid a stipend of $750 for their work over the calendar year, totalling $3750. Each of the five faculty mentees (from small departments) would receive $50 worth of books on teaching (such as Ken Bain's What the Best College Teachers Do), totalling $250. The total budget is $4000. The stipends would be awarded to faculty in Fall 2025. The junior faculty would get their books in early Summer 2025.

A pre-program survey will be sent in early fall 2025, and a post-program survey sent in late spring 2026, to assess the MOP plan. The surveys will include summative and formative questions asked of the faculty participants, so the steering committee can assess the effectiveness of the program and revise it as needed.

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The faculty mentors will submit a joint 500-word report in Summer 2026 about their experiences, which would make recommendations for changes to the program. The Steering Committee will meet to debrief those faculty in Fall 2026 after the Steering Committee has read the report. We expect to pilot MOP for two years before we ask the AAPT Board to make MOP a permanent part of AAPT's programming.

## Project Impact

There are several benefits to the MOP model:

(1) Philosophy instructors in small departments gain quality feedback from experienced mentors from other institutions who have expert training from the AAPT in philosophical pedagogy.
(2) The profession improves with better classroom experiences for students and increased retention of first-year students after an introductory course in philosophy.
(3) Isolated faculty connect, through cross-institutional mentoring relationship, to a network of philosophers within the broader community dedicated to the practice of teaching philosophy.
(4) The body of best practices for philosophy instruction and pedagogical mentoring expands, since the AAPT will encourage all MOP participants to present their experiences in a panel at one of the three divisional APA-AAPT Teaching Hubs.

## Project Goals

- See the Project Description section of this online application form.

## Project Timeline

See the Project Description section of this online application form. We expect it to run Spring 2025 to August 2026.

## Project Outreach

The audiences are early-career faculty (tenure-track, visiting, lecturer, and adjunct or contingent) in small philosophy departments with one or two faculty. The steering committee will use the social media channels and listservs of the APA and AAPT, and the AAPT web page.

## Accessibility Plan

Statement: The AAPT will place, as part of the call for applications, an ADA statement indicating that the application and selection process are open to all candidates regardless of ability status. Since the MOP will operate long-distance using a web-based tool like Zoom, MOP mentee candidates will be asked if they require any reasonable accommodations for using Zoom. Moreover, the MOP mentors will work with their home colleges and universities' office of student accommodation to determine how best to use Zoom to accommodate those MOP mentees.

Best practices in include using closed caption, breakout rooms for interpreters, muting participants upon room entry, providing Zoom keyboard shortcuts in advance, describing images and visuals, enabling non-verbal feedback like use of emojis, etc. (See Yale's helpful list at https://usability.yale.edu/web-accessibility/articles/zoom)

Line item: N/A, as MOP Mentors will work with their home colleges' office of student accommodations to implement best practices in Zoom with MOP Mentees in need of those accommodations.

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Point person: Jack Musselman in Austin TX and/or David Gray in Buffalo NY.

Sample language: If an applicant to the MOP believes they need reasonable accommodations to participate in this program, they should indicate in the application form what those might be. Their designated point of contact would be Jack or David.

Two expert resources: The disability support services offices at St. Edward's University (who work with Jack) and SUNY Buffalo (who work with David)

## Evaluation Plan

A pre-program survey will be sent in early fall 2025, and a post-program survey sent in late spring 2026, to assess the MOP plan. The surveys will include summative and formative questions asked of the faculty participants, so the steering committee can assess the effectiveness of the program and revise it as needed.

The faculty mentors will submit a joint 500-word report in Summer 2026 about their experiences, which would make recommendations for changes to the program. The Steering Committee will meet to debrief those faculty in Fall 2026 after the Steering Committee has read the report. We expect to pilot MOP for two years before we ask the AAPT Board to make MOP a permanent part of AAPT's programming.

## Online Presence

The steering committee will use the social media channels and listservs of the APA and AAPT. The AAPT will create a link on its web page about MOP.

https://philosophyteachers.org/ (on the main front page)

## Budget Narrative

Each of the five faculty mentors would be paid a stipend of $750 for their work over the calendar year, totalling $3750. Each of the five faculty mentees (from small departments) would receive $50 worth of books on teaching (such as Ken Bain's What the Best College Teachers Do), totalling $250. The total budget is $4000. The stipends would be awarded to faculty in Fall 2025. The junior faculty would get their books in early Summer 2025.

## Other Funding Sources

N/A

American
Philosophical
Association

# American Philosophical Association Small Grant Budget Template

| | |
|---|---|
| Project Title: | The Mentor Observation Program (MOP) for Small Philosphy Departments |
| Project Coordinator(s): | Jack Musselman and David Gray |
| Total Funding Request: | $4,000 |

*Proposals over $5,000 normally are not funded.*

| Item (e.g., salaries, honoraria, supplies, | Estimated Cost | Amount Requested from OtherSources | Amount Requested from APA |
|---|---|---|---|
| $750 stipend each for 5 mentors | $3,750 | $0 | $3,750 |
| $50 for teaching books for each of 5 mentees | $250 | $0 | $250 |
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| **Total** | $   4,000.00 | $              - | $         4,000.00 |

*Cells in the total row automatically total the items in the column above them.*

*The total cell for the last column must match the total in the top section of the budget template. If the total here does not match the*

**JACK MUSSELMAN**

St. Edward's University, 3001 South Congress Avenue, Austin Texas, 78704-6489, USA

Work 512.428.1026, Cell 512 577 7505, Email jackgm@stedwards.edu (best way to reach me)

*Online*
Faculty page at **https://www.jackmusselman.org**
Department of Philosophy page at **http://philosophyonthehilltop.org**
Department page on Facebook at **www.facebook.com/1873SEU**

**AOS/AOC**

*Areas of specialization*: philosophy of law, ethics
*Areas of competence*: social and political philosophy

**Education**

Ph.D./Doctor of Philosophy
Indiana University, Department of Philosophy
November 2000

M.A./Master of Arts
University of Michigan, Department of Philosophy
August 1989

B.A./Bachelor of Arts, with distinction
University of Virginia, Department of Philosophy
May 1987

1er degré/Premier degré, French language and culture
Hamilton College Junior Year in France
April 1986

**Publications**

"The Philosopher and the Game Producer: Am I a Bad Person if I Enjoy Doing Bad Things (in a Video Game)?" with Robert Denton Bryant, *Well Played: A Journal on Video Games, Value and Meaning,* vol. 11, no. 1, 2022, Carnegie Mellon University ETC Press, available at https://press.etc.cmu.edu/index.php/product/well-played-vol-11-no-1/.

"Russian and American students deliberating online: Complementing core courses with inter-cultural communication skills" with Dr. Ekaterina Lukyanova (St. Petersburg State University, Russia), part of Michigan State University's Transformation in Higher Education Series, *Deliberative Pedagogy and Democratic Engagement* (2017), 99-106. Book available at http://msupress.org/books/book/?id=50-1D0-3FDB#.WS7qgNzavIU

"Design and Implementation: Transparency and Problem-Based Learning at St. Edward's University," with Cory Lock, Michael Saclolo, Chad Long, and Susan Loughran. *Peer Review: Transparency and Problem-Centered Learning.* Association of American

Colleges and Universities. 18.1/2 (Winter 2016). Article available online at https://www.aacu.org/peerreview/2016/winter-spring/Musselman

"Plato's Allegory of the Cave in Second Life," *Academic Commons* 2010 online in *Advancing Toward Liberal Arts 3.0*, co-authored with Jason Rosenblum. See the web at http://www.academiccommons.org/2014/09/12/platos-allegory-of-the-cave-in-second-life/ (also recognized with a Community Contribution Award in 2009, see http://www.nitle.org/news/story.php?id=73)
.
"Smoking Pot Doesn't Hurt Anyone but Me!" *Why Adults Should be Allowed to Consume Cannabis*," in *Cannabis-Philosophy for Everyone: What Were We Just Talking About?* (Wiley Blackwell 2010), co-authored with R. Frohardt and D. G. Lynch. Book available at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781444324440.ch13/summary

"Natural Law for Teaching Ethics: An Essential Tool and not a Seamless Web," in *The Normativity of the Natural: Human Goods, Human Virtues, and Human Flourishing* (Springer 2009). Book available at http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-90-481-2301-8_5

## Awards and grants

Parrhesia Program for Public Discourse College Faculty Seminar, Freedom of Expression, Academic Inquiry, and Campus Discourse, June 4-8, 2023 (funded)

Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) New Currents in Teaching Philosophy (July 2023), funded activities supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, application supported by Marianne Ward-Peradoza (Provost), Sharon Nell (Dean), Mark Cherry (Chair and Professor)

Council of Independent Colleges, Deliberation and Debate Workshop, July 2021, Washington D.C. (funded activities covered travel, hotel, meals)

Council of Independent Colleges Consortium for Online Humanities Instruction II (2016-2018), funded activities supported by the CIC and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Team Members Mary Boyd (Vice President for Academic Affairs), Georgia Seminet (Assistant Professor of Spanish), Lance Hayes (Registrar). Online at https://www.cic.edu/programs/online-humanities

## Professional service

*Consulting Editor*                                    *College Teaching*, 2006-present

*As* consulting editor *I review articles submitted to College Teaching (Heldref Publications)*

*American Association of Philosophy Teachers*          AAPT, 2008-present

*Finance Committee (2011-2021), At-Large Board member through December 2022, AAPT Advancement Committee (2021-present)*

# David Emmanuel Gray

University at Buffalo
118 Park Hall
Buffalo, NY 14260-4150

**degray@buffalo.edu**
716-645-3983

## EDUCATION

**Ph.D. in Logic, Computation & Methodology**,
Carnegie Mellon University; August 2010.

**M.S. in Logic & Computation**, Carnegie
Mellon University; May 2004.

**B.A. in Philosophy**, with High Honors,
University of Montana; May 2001.

**B.S. in Computer Science**, University Scholar with
High Honors, University of Montana; May 2001.

## AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Social & Political Philosophy, Ethical Theory,
and the Philosophy of Decision Theory.

## AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Conflict Resolution, Business Ethics,
Bioethics, Global Justice, and  Logic.

## FACULTY APPOINTMENTS

**Associate Teaching Professor of Philosophy**, State
University of New York at Buffalo (UB); March 2023 – Present.

**Associate Member, Graduate Faculty** of the State
University of New York at Buffalo; September 2021 – Present.

Clinical Assistant Professor of Philosophy, State University
of New York at Buffalo; August 2020 – February 2023.

## ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS

Interim Director of Undergraduate Studies, Department of
Philosophy, State University of New York at Buffalo;
January 2022 – May 2022.

## GRANTS

"Supporting Student Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE)
Capstone Projects"; Hayek Fund for Scholars, The Institute for
Humane Studies (IHS), George Mason University; January 2022.

## PRESENTATIONS

"Specifications Grading"; University at Buffalo Teaching
& Learning Community of Knowledge (UB TaLCK); State
University of New York at Buffalo; February 2022.

"Defending Philosophy"; 11th Annual Life Raft Debate; UB Honors
College, State University of New York at Buffalo; February 2022.

## PANEL DISCUSSIONS

"Faculty Champions," with Rebecca Begalle (Undergraduate
Clinical Coordinator of Exercise & Nutrition Sciences,
School of Public Health & Health Professions, State
University of New York at Buffalo); Faculty Champion
Recognition Ceremony; Career Design Center, State
University of New York at Buffalo; April  2023.

"Incorporating Career Competencies into your Courses," with
Jessica Kruger (Clinical Assistant Professor of Community
Health & Health Behavior, and Director of Teaching Innovation &
Excellence, School of Public Health & Health Professions, State
University of New York at Buffalo) & Jay Stockslader (Director
of Online Learning & Continuing Education, College of Arts &
Sciences, State University of New York at Buffalo); UB EDC
Summer 2022 Webinar Series; Educational Design Collaborative,
State University of New York at Buffalo; June 2022.

## GRADUATE COURSES DESIGNED & TAUGHT

**Teaching Philosophy**
UB (Phil. 604) Spring 2022.

## UNDERGRADUATE COURSES DESIGNED & TAUGHT

**Integrating Philosophy, Politics & Economics (PPE
Senior Capstone)** UB (Phil. 485) Spring 2022, Spring 2023.

**Political Philosophy** UB (Phil. 342) Spring 2021
(synchronous online), Spring 2022, Spring 2023.

**Conflict & Dispute Resolution**
UB (Phil. 353) Fall 2021, Fall 2022.

**Social Philosophy** UB (Phil. 341) Fall 2020
(synchronous online), Fall 2021, Fall 2022.

**Introduction to Ethics** UB (Phil. 107, all asynchronous
online) Fall 2020, Spring 2021, Fall 2021, Fall 2022.

**Philosophy of Social Science** UB (Phil.  322)
Spring 2021 (synchronous online).

**Business Ethics** UB (Phil. 236) Fall 2020 (synchronous online).

## GRADUATE PROGRAMS TAUGHT & SUPERVISED

**UB Social Impact Fellows Program** Summer 2023 (with
Michael Lynch, Clinical Associate Professor of Field Education,
School of Social Work, and Tom Murdock, Clinical Assistant
Professor of Entrepreneurship, School of Management).

## experiential learning network (eLN) projects supervised

**The Gift of Thrift: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**
UB (as part of Phil. 485) Spring 2023.

**Buffalo SOUP: Collaboratively Crowdfunding to Make Buffalo Better** UB (as part of Phil. 485) Spring 2023.

**Books for a Cause: Homelessness**
UB (as part of Phil. 485) Spring 2023.

**UB Homework Helpers: Tutoring Students in the Buffalo Public Schools System** UB (as part of Phil. 485) Spring 2022.

**UB Munchies: Nutritional Awareness for College Students** UB (as part of Phil. 485) Spring 2022.

**Composting & Failing Forward: A Local Composting Facility in Depew** UB (as part of Phil. 485) Spring 2022.

## undergraduate independent studies supervised

**Political Philosophy** UB (Phil. 498) Spring 2022, Spring 2023.

**Social Philosophy** UB (Phil. 498) Fall 2021, Fall 2022.

**Conflict & Dispute Resolution** UB (Phil. 498) Fall 2022.

**Ethics** UB (Phil. 498) Fall 2022.

## service

### To the Profession

Development Committee; American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT); January 2023 – Present.

Conference Programming Committee; American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT); August 2021 – Present.

Session Chair; Lenssen Prize 2020 Honorable Mentions Spotlight, American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT) Twenty-Third Biennial International Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy; Otterbein University, Westerville, Ohio; July 2022.

### To the University at Buffalo

Faculty Advisor, PPE Club, UB; Spring 2022 – Present.

Non-Tenure Track Faculty Advisory Council; Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, UB; Spring 2021 – Present.

Founding Member, University at Buffalo Teaching & Learning Community of Knowledge (UB TaLCK), UB; Fall 2020 – Present.

Reviewer, Presidential Scholarship Applications; University Honors College, UB; January 2022.

Search Committee for Digital Learning Designer; Curriculum, Assessment & Teaching Transformation (CATT), UB; Fall 2021.

Principal Organizer, Summer Book Club, University at Buffalo Teaching & Learning Community of Knowledge (UB TaLCK), UB; Summer 2021.

### To the College of Arts & Sciences, University at Buffalo

Philosophy Department Representative, College of Arts & Sciences Grievance Pool, UB; November 2022 – Present.

Faculty Marshal, College of Arts & Sciences Undergraduate Commencement, UB; May 2022, May 2023.

### To the Department of Philosophy, University at Buffalo

Chair, Teaching Quality Committee; Philosophy Department, UB; Fall 2022 – Present.

Undergraduate Affairs Committee; Philosophy Department, UB; Fall 2020 – Present.

PPE Program Committee; Philosophy Department, UB; Fall 2020 – Present.

Faculty Search Committee for Open-Rank, Tenure-Track Professor of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE); Philosophy Department, UB; Spring 2023.

Faculty Search Committee for Clinical Assistant Professor; Philosophy Department, UB; Spring 2021.

Judge, Philosophy Course Poster Design Contest; Philosophy Department, UB; Spring 2021.

## media coverage & interviews

Bert Gambini, "UB students to hold crowdsourcing event for community organizations," *UBNow* (April 27, 2023).

Newell Nussbaumer (queenseyes), "'Buffalo Soup' Makes The World Better," *Buffalo Rising* (April 26, 2023).

Archana Mohan, "UB Homework Helpers tutoring for change in Buffalo schools," *UBNow* (January 13, 2023).

Kiana Hodge & Kyle Nguyen, "UB Homework Helpers provides free tutoring for K-12 students in Buffalo," *The Sprectrum* (November 2, 2022).

Charles Anzalone, "PPE capstone trains leaders to make the world better," *UBNow* (May 16, 2022).

Charles Anzalone, "Faculty partnerships critical to Career Design Center," *UBNow* (April 13, 2022).

Grace Osaba, "Survival after doomsday? UB professors debate the best path," *UBNow* (February 23, 2022).

## honors & awards

2023 Academic Integrity Award, Faculty Distinction; Office of Academic Integrity, UB.

2023 Career Champion Award; Career Design Center, UB.