

## **Philosophy Opportunities and Conversations for Underserved Students (PhOCUS)**

Parr Center for Ethics and UNC Philosophy Outreach Program

Year: 2014

Total Funding: \$4,000

### **Overview**

This project's goal was to strengthen existing Parr Center for Ethics and UNC Philosophy Outreach Program initiatives, to promote philosophical and ethical engagement with underserved and low-income high school student populations. This project consisted of both a national initiative that enabled the opportunity for high school students from low socioeconomic areas to travel and participate in the National High School Ethics Bowl competition, and local outreach initiative that encouraged students from underserved communities within North Carolina's Research Triangle to engage with each other in regular, guided conversations about significant ethical and philosophical questions.

#### National Outreach Initiative

The National Outreach initiative was to support the Parr Center for Ethics in establishing a National High School Ethics Bowl (NHSEB) scholarship fund for low-income high schools that do not have the resources to (i) start an ethics bowl team or (ii) travel to their regional and/or national competition. We wanted to provide engagement with philosophical matters and discussions to underserved students that would not have the opportunity of exposure in their classroom setting or community. Our goal was to create an inclusive educational and developmental opportunity for all students within the NHSEB community.

After being awarded the APA Small Grant, we used a portion of the PhOCUS funds—\$2,145—to support a travel assistance scholarship for low-income schools competing in the National High School Ethics Bowl at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on April 11-12, 2015. Twenty-two high schools traveled to compete in the National competition from eighteen states and Canada. There were fifteen public high schools and seven private or independent high schools. Of the fifteen public high schools, only two were classified as Title I. We used the U.S. Department of Education's Title I classification as a source to determine if a school automatically qualified for the travel assistance scholarship as outlined in PhOCUS. However, the two Title I high schools had received full funding from their Regional Ethics Bowl to travel to Chapel Hill.

In re-evaluating our initial proposal, we created a NHSEB travel assistance scholarship application for coaches to complete and submit on behalf of their students. The form can be found [here](http://goo.gl/forms/CF2BSFspkV) (<http://goo.gl/forms/CF2BSFspkV>). Our goal was to provide team scholarship assistance to students who self-identified as having a lower socioeconomic status, but did not attend a high school in a low-income area or high school that was classified as Title I. In doing this, we received five team requests for assistance. In completing the travel assistance scholarship application, the coaches identified their students as “coming from single parent homes with low economic backgrounds” and

“living with financial hardships at home”. An overarching theme was students lack of financial stability to pay for a plane ticket.

In total, PhOCUS with the support of the Parr Center for Ethics provided \$3,200 in travel scholarship assistance to the National competition. The 2015 National competition was the largest in the NHSEB history: over 1600 high school students spent a year studying cases, discussing important ethical issues, and learning how to think fruitfully about morally complex situations. Twenty-one students from five teams located in Avon, Indiana, Boca Raton, Florida, Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and Oakland, California received a travel scholarship specifically from PhOCUS. The Parr Center used funds outside of the APA small grant to support the travel of six students from Winnipeg, Canada.

#### Funding Breakdown

Cherry Hill High School East (7 students)	\$750
Boca Raton Community High School(5 students)	\$750
Avon High School (4 students)	\$500
Kirby School (5 students)	\$500
River East Collegiate (6 students)	\$700 (PhOCUS was not used)
Total Travel Assistance Scholarships	\$3,200
PhOCUS	\$2,145
Parr Center for Ethics Contribution	\$1,055

#### Local Outreach Initiatives

As part of PhOCUS, the Philosophy Department and Parr Center planned to strengthen its Outreach Program in two ways in 2014-2015. First, we planned to strengthen our longstanding relationship with the C.A. Dillon Youth Development Center. Second, we planned to expand our outreach offerings for local high school students in low income and underserved communities, finding at least two new community partners in the Research Triangle.

#### **C.A. Dillon (Butner, NC)**

C.A. Dillon is a detention and rehabilitation facility, operated by North Carolina’s Department of Public Safety, for underage males convicted of crimes in North Carolina. Philosophy Outreach volunteers have been leading philosophy discussions for students at C.A. Dillon since 2006. Since this time, the program at C.A. Dillon is seen as a centerpiece of the Outreach Program. As part of the PhOCUS program, we were able to expand our involvement at C.A. Dillon in terms of both the number of volunteers we committed to this program, and the number of sessions we held. In 2014-2015, we had eight volunteers (two graduate students, four undergraduates, and two faculty members) participating in discussions at C.A. Dillon, as compared to four (two graduate students, one undergraduate, and one faculty member) in 2013-2014, two (both graduate students)

in 2012-2013, and three (all graduate students) in 2011-2012. With this increased volunteer support, we were able to hold 26 sessions (compared to 22 in 2013-2014, ~14 in 2012-2013, and 8 in 2011-2012).

As part of this expanded effort, we piloted a HSEB program at C.A. Dillon in Fall 2014, with the goal of getting these students to compete in either the NC Regional HSEB Competition or in an informal competition with one or more teams from local high schools. Throughout the fall, 2-4 volunteers would travel to C.A. Dillon every week, leading hour-long discussions about the HSEB cases (for 4-8 students), and teaching the group members about important moral concepts related to those cases. (During this time, following the protests related to the officer-involved deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, we also held two discussions on issues related to race, criminal justice, and police violence.) While these conversations were often interesting and engaging, we were not ultimately able to get these students to compete in 2014-2015.

In the spring, we continued meeting with C.A. Dillon students, but expanded the range of our conversations to other interesting philosophical topics beyond ethics--including human nature, arguments for and against the existence of God, knowledge and uncertainty, and the philosophy of time. Because of student interest in the topic, we also had a series of discussions related to aging. These sessions canvassed questions such as: What does it mean to “grow up”? What do we gain and lose as we age (and is it better to stay young)? How can one’s outward appearance (of one’s age) affect their experience?

### **Other Local Programs**

As part of our PhOCUS activities in 2014-2015, the Outreach Program was able to reestablish a relationship with one local high school, began working with students at two additional high schools, and expanded our involvement in a one-day conference for high school students from throughout North Carolina.

### **Hillside High School (Durham, NC)**

This year, we were able to reestablish a past partnership with Hillside High School ([http://hillside.dpsnc.net/pages/Hillside\\_High](http://hillside.dpsnc.net/pages/Hillside_High)). Part of Durham Public Schools, Hillside serves a largely underserved urban community, and is designated a “High Priority School”. According to the U.S. News and World Report data, 97% of Hillside’s student population are racial/ethnic minorities, and 66% are economically disadvantaged, qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. This year, the Outreach Program worked to reestablish an Ethics Bowl program at Hillside. Throughout much of the fall semester, three UNC volunteers (all undergraduates enrolled in UNC’s *Pre-College Philosophy* course) travelled regularly to Hillside, to help their new HSEB team prepare for the NC Regional competition. Volunteers led sessions on Kantian Ethics, Consequentialism, Virtue Ethics, Ethics of Care, and Contractualism, and helped these students prepare their analyses of the Regional cases.

In addition to our work to reestablish an Ethics Bowl program, Dr. Steven Swartzler, the Outreach Program Coordinator, has been working with Hillside teacher (and HSEB club advisor), Shyanisimi Ogede, who is developing a course for students at Hillside on moral

and political philosophy. During their consultations, Dr. Swartzer and Ms. Ogede discussed different options for how to frame the course, possible texts and readings, and types of support that the Outreach Program could provide during this course. With continued support, Ms. Ogede plans to offer this course in the near future.

### **Durham School of the Arts (Durham, NC)**

The Durham School of the Arts (<http://dsa.dpsnc.net/>) is a magnet school for grades 6-12 within the Durham Public Schools school district. Durham School of the Arts (DSA) was founded in 1995, and emphasizes the importance of educating students in the visual and performing arts. This school population is majority-minority, and contains a large proportion of economically disadvantaged students from throughout Durham. In December 2014, we learned that DSA has a student-organized philosophy club. We reached out to the school administration, to offer our assistance to this program. After coordinating with the club's faculty sponsor, one Outreach volunteer (a UNC graduate student) attended four philosophy club meetings in the spring. During these meetings, the club members decide on a topic, and begin to debate the main philosophical issues involved. This spring, club members chose to discuss the relationship between law and morality, extended selves, gender and sexuality, and ethics in the media. The Outreach volunteer's main role in these discussions has been to help keep the conversation focused on the philosophical issues by drawing attention to the distinction between philosophical questions and questions that are better served by empirical, scientific investigation. Additionally, the volunteer presses the students to offer supporting reasons for the points that they raise, in order to help maintain the philosophical rigor of their debates and discussions.

### **Raleigh Charter (Raleigh, NC)**

The Outreach Program also established a new relationship with Raleigh Charter High School (<https://www.raleighcharterhs.org/>). Raleigh Charter was founded in 1999 and serves the diverse urban population of Raleigh, North Carolina. In 2014-2015, Raleigh Charter joined the HSEB competition. One Outreach volunteer (a UNC graduate student) worked with this team throughout much of the fall semester and early January. The volunteer helped the team become acquainted with the rules and format of the HSEB, helped them prepare their analyses of the regional cases, and worked with them to sharpen their presentation skills. After the regional competition, the team members were excited to continue discussing many of these issues, and the Outreach program supported their effort to compete in an online 'Ethics Olympiad' against a high school in Australia.

Additionally, one of these HSEB team members, who was also a member of the school's Honor Council, decided to organize a forum for Raleigh Charter students on the topic of "Honor Beyond High School". This forum included an hour-long panel discussion, and we were asked if we could find an ethics professor or graduate student to participate in this panel. One graduate student was especially interested in participating in this discussion.

### **North Carolina School of Science and Math (Durham, NC)**

The Outreach Program was also able to expand its support for a major annual event for North Carolina high school students. In 2014, the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics (NCSSM) hosted its 17th annual Ethics and Leadership Conference (<http://www.ncssm.edu/ethics/>) for high school students from across the state. This conference is a one-day event that provides 200+ high school students the opportunity to interact with peers from across the state, as well as educators, researchers, businesspeople, and community leaders to discuss challenges facing those in leadership positions and interesting issues in contemporary ethics. After a keynote address, the students participate in small (~15 students) group breakout sessions (approximately 75 minutes) in the morning and afternoon, each of which addressed different issues in ethics and/or leadership. UNC philosophy graduate students and faculty led discussions on animal ethics, biomedical enhancement, the trolley problem, obligation to obey the law, and other topics. In 2014, we had greater volunteer participation in the Ethics and Leadership Conference than we have ever had previous had, with nine Philosophy faculty and graduate students participating in this event (compared to eight in 2013, five in 2012, and four in 2011). Because of this increased participation, we were able to provide all the necessary volunteer support (including judges and the moderator) for the NCSSM's first annual Invitational HSEB competition, which was held concurrently with the conference.

Through all of these PhOCUS-related Outreach activities at C.A. Dillon and elsewhere, nineteen different UNC Outreach volunteers participated in nearly fifty philosophy discussions with high school students in 2014-2015. Many of these high school students are from economically disadvantaged and underserved communities. Department faculty participated in these activities on a pro bono basis, and graduate students are paid a small honorarium (\$50-\$65) for each discussion they are involved in. Undergraduates participate either on a voluntary basis, or for experiential education credit as part of UNC's *Pre-College Philosophy* course. Volunteers can arrange transportation through the Philosophy department's Zipcar account, or they can be compensated for the use of their own personal vehicles.

Funding Breakdown

Honoraria for graduate student facilitators/coaches	\$1,440
Transportation	\$315
Materials & Incidentals	\$100
 Total expenses for local PhOCUS programs	 \$1,855

## Evaluation Plan

### National Outreach Initiatives

PhOCUS was assessed in two forms: (i) online surveys given to students and coaches who participated in the National competition, and (ii) internal evaluation of goals met during the project.

The online surveys provided to both students and coaches contained a mixture of likert-scale, contingency, and open-ended questions. The student survey can be accessed [here](http://goo.gl/forms/5cHvjT5WtD) (<http://goo.gl/forms/5cHvjT5WtD>). The questions asked to students were specific to their potential interest in philosophy and/or ethics outside the ethics bowl format; describing how their involvement with ethics bowl changed their thinking and discussion about local, national, and global news; and suggestions to improving the NHSEB. The coach survey can be accessed [here](http://goo.gl/forms/w46N256Oea) (<http://goo.gl/forms/w46N256Oea>). The questions asked to the coaches are more evaluative of the program's goal—how participating in ethics bowl develops students' intellectual abilities and capacities, deepens their ethical understanding, and reinforces their sense of ethical commitment—and suggestions to improving the NHSEB.

The online surveys were sent a week after the National competition via email to coaches who participated in the ethics bowl season, in turn we trusted the coaches would send their students the student survey link. Additionally, the surveys were posted on the National High School Ethics Bowl Facebook page for all students and coaches to access (<https://www.facebook.com/EthicsBowl/posts/881540365253025>). We sent several reminders to coaches throughout the summer to complete the evaluative surveys as well reminding them to have their students complete their survey. Compared to previous years, we had a high success rate of completed surveys from both coaches and students. We received responses from thirty-three students and seventeen coaches. All participated in the National competition. The information gathered has enabled the Parr Center for Ethics to re-evaluate NHSEB rules regarding team composition, registration payments, and team commentary during an ethics bowl match as well as how we can better incorporate the goals of PhOCUS into our ethics bowl programming.

After the National competition and receiving the majority of completed surveys from coaches and students, the PhOCUS steering committee members (in October 2014, Dr. Geoff Sayre-McCord replaced Dr. Jeanette Boxill position) completed an internal evaluation of PhOCUS. As stated in the grant proposal, our goal for the National outreach initiative was to expand opportunities for high school students from low-income schools to participate in the ethics bowl competition. Using PhOCUS, we were able to provide twenty-one students from across the country the opportunity to compete in the National competition. Although some of the goals proposed in PhOCUS were not put into action which include providing technology (web camera, timers, recorders) or other materials and incidents (philosophy books, etc), we realized our largest factor that prevents low-income high schools or students that self-identify as having a low socioeconomic status

participate in ethics bowl is the lack of financial support for traveling to their regional bowl competition or National competition.

For the 2015-2016 NHSEB season, we have confirmed seven new regional competitions across the United States: Chicago, Southern Illinois, Connecticut, Orange County California, Ohio, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, New York City, and Georgia. In total, we will have 30 regional competitions in comparison to 22 regionals last season. The new regional ethics bowls have the potential to reach 336 high school students and develop their intellectual abilities and capacities, deepen their ethical understanding, and reinforce their sense of ethical commitment. The Parr Center for Ethics will continue to apply for grants and other funding resources in order to ensure a more sustainable travel assistance scholarship program for underserved and low-income high school student populations.

### Local Outreach Initiatives

#### **C.A. Dillon**

In piloting an Ethics Bowl program at C.A. Dillon, our ambitious goal was “to get C.A. Dillon students to compete against other local high school students in or more of three venues: (i) in the 2015 North Carolina Regional HSEB competition, (ii) in a local invitational tournament, or (iii) in informal, one-on-one competitions with local schools.” Unfortunately, a number of factors prevented us from achieving this goal.

Our primary contact at Dillon--Chaplain McKeown--was very interested in bringing HSEB to C.A. Dillon. However, none of us were interested in having these students compete if they were not in a position to feel positive about their experiences. One particular obstacle to this involved the time commitment needed to prepare for this competition as a team, the skills (such as public speaking skills) that students need to develop as they prepare, and the opportunities that these students need to research and discuss these topics. Our time with these students was limited to one hour per week, and we knew that it would be important to enable these students to work on their cases together, outside of this time. Chaplain McKeown agreed to reach out to teachers at C.A. Dillon who might be able to help these students prepare, to supervise their research and daytime discussions. Unfortunately, Chaplain McKeown was unable to find teachers who were willing to take on these additional responsibilities. Despite these limitations, we decided to continue working toward preparing these students for the competition, to see how far we could get them. Ultimately, we did not feel like we were able to bring them up to the level that they would need to be at in order to be successful in this competition.

Three other challenges also prevented from meeting our goal of getting them to compete, either in a regional competition, or informally. First, whether or not individual students are able to attend our discussion is based partly on the availability of staff members to transport them from their housing units to where the discussions are held, and partly on the discretion of on-duty staff as to whether or not these particular students should be allowed to attend on a given evening. For this reason, we only had full attendance for approximately half of our fall semester meetings. Second, two of our eight C.A. Dillon students would be unavailable for competing during the spring semester because they were being released back into their communities. This included one student who was the

group's most active participant, and one of the group's best public speakers. The release of these students prior to the competition was an unexpected (but positive!) development that we had not considered. Since the NC-HSEB will be held in January in 2016, and since C.A. Dillon winter releases are often scheduled to coincide with the New Year, we might expect a similar issue to occur again. Third, Chaplain McKeown notified us early in January that she was taking a new position elsewhere, and would no longer be working at C.A. Dillon. While other staff members took on her responsibilities coordinating with outside groups (such as ours), this transition has been highly disorganized, making it impossible to arrange any other informal competition between these students and students from another local high school. As of September 1, the Department of Public Safety has not yet hired a full time replacement for Chaplain McKeown, and so we should expect many of these problems to continue into the future.

Despite the fact that we were not ultimately able to get C.A. Dillon students to compete against students from other schools, this program nevertheless furthered our Outreach Program's broader goals: (i) to help people in the community think carefully and clearly about a broad range of ideas, commitments, and practices that regularly shape their lives, and (ii) to get them excited about philosophy.

The C.A. Dillon students were usually (but certainly not always) engaged in these discussions, and were able to discuss these issues with the volunteers, and with each other in critical and reflective ways. The discussions on issues related to the criminal justice system were especially interesting--during these discussions, the C.A. Dillon students demonstrated the ability to think critically about their own situation, about their own needs as juvenile offenders, and about whether the juvenile justice system was adequately serving those needs. One student expressed a concern that their experiences within youth prison are not likely to serve them well on the outside. For example, given that the students are micromanaged while at C.A. Dillon, and have all aspects of their lives under supervision, this student was concerned that they are not being encouraged to think or make choices for themselves--which is what they will need to be able to do after they are released. Another student noted that one of the main reasons why he and many of the other students at C.A. Dillon (and many teenagers, more generally) got into trouble in the first place was that they did not know how to handle boredom--he expressed that even though he was bored throughout much of his time at C.A. Dillon, he has never been taught how to deal with this constructively. During these discussions, the students expressed that the skills that they developed through thinking through philosophical questions were probably more useful for responding to the particular challenges they faced than many of the other things they learned in their time at C.A. Dillon.

Moreover, some of these students developed strong interests in philosophy. These students would bring questions about things that they were thinking about, and many of these questions became the basis for future sessions. One student in particular expressed that he planned to go to college, and wanted to study philosophy and business. He was insistent about having us bring him college-level philosophical reading material. For these reasons, the Outreach Program gifted him copies of *The Trial and Death of Socrates* and Plato's *Republic*. In subsequent weeks, he mentioned that he had started



reading them, and even though he found it really challenging, he was enjoying it--he even brought us a question about something he had read in the *Euthyphro* that served as the basis for a discussion about the definition of “god”.

### **Other Local Programs**

With respect to our other programs related to PhOCUS, our stated goal was “to find at least two new partner schools/organizations in 2014-2015.” We achieved this goal, starting new partnerships with Raleigh Charter and Durham School of the Arts. Additionally, we were able to reestablish a former partnership with Hillside High School, and strengthen our relationship with NCSSM. All of these partnerships will continue into 2015-2016.

Moreover, in feedback from the high school student participants and the teachers we worked with at these schools, we believe that these programs promoted our Outreach Program’s broader goals. For instance, the fact that Raleigh Charter students continued seeking out new opportunities to think about these issues, and to engage in conversations about these issues with each other (and with professional philosophers) is evidence that this program is succeeding in developing their interest in philosophy. Similarly, Ms. Ogede at Hillside High has expressed that her students are eager to continue discussing the types of topics that come up in Ethics Bowl cases, and that because of this program, she is confident that she will find plenty of interest in her oral and political philosophy course. While the students at Durham School of the Arts have already demonstrated an interest in philosophy by establishing their own philosophy club, the club’s faculty advisor has communicated that she is confident that our participation will help to sustain this interest. Moreover, the faculty advisor and graduate student volunteer have both expressed that our involvement helps to make these discussions more intellectually and philosophically rigorous. For these reasons, we do not see the needs to make any changes to these programs at this time.