Overview of the Project: The purpose of the Lyceum was to utilize pre-college philosophy as a way to generate benefits in how students came to appreciate how common philosophy can be applied within their lives. By researching various methods on teaching pre-college philosophy including studying lesson plans done by other programs, I, along with an undergraduate philosophy major who wanted to assist with the project, created a curriculum to be taught over the course of a week in the summer of 2019. The program took place during the week of July 8-12 with six participants between the ages of 12-18.

I. The Project
II. Evaluation
III. Funding Use

Section I: The Project

The background research for the project focused on learner centered teaching, primarily from the work of Tom Wartenberg, Jana Mohr Lone, Michael Burroughs, PLATO (Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization) and other Philosophy for Children theorists and practitioners. For this approach to be successful, teachers must think of themselves as facilitators rather than lecturers. As facilitators, our role is to provide information when it’s necessary, not just because we can, and encourage students to interrogate their ideas through the use of dialogue. Dialogue is a very important tool when using a learner centered approach because students ultimately take ownership of the discussion, generating their own nuanced conversation among each other. Taking Wartenberg’s point about children as natural born philosophers seriously requires engaging them in questions that are meaningful to them. For example, when a child is told an action is forbidden and they ask why, they are asking for an explanation of the moral value of that action. It was discussing this example with my mentee that led us to focus on ethics and social and political philosophy throughout the week, as ethical dilemmas are often how people grasp the importance of philosophical thinking, and political philosophy is often supported through the use of ethical thinking. She also noted the importance of social media and how navigating these spaces are critical for how younger generations navigate ethical and political issues.

The plan was to develop a number of activities to cover a 9am-3pm day, including lunch, and have some backup activities available as well. The final day would end with student presentations about a philosophical issue that intrigued them. Based on how students respond to the material, we had various ways to generate discussion, including using including YouTube videos, pop culture examples, and having them draw out their ideas rather than solely discussing
them. We would also have them provide before-and-after responses about what they knew about philosophy, why they want to pursue whatever future goals they value, and to gain feedback about the program. Each student had their own binder with the materials for the week. These were the themes for each day, as well as who we had students read or whom we discussed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro to Philosophy/Epistemology</td>
<td>Ethics- Virtue, Stoicism, Utilitarianism</td>
<td>Social &amp; Political Philosophy</td>
<td>Justice &amp; Injustice</td>
<td>Meaning of Life/ On Bullshit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mill - Utilitarianism</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass – 4th of July Speech</td>
<td>King Jr. – Letter From Birmingham Jail</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mini Ethics Bowl</td>
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The students included two Black males, three white males, including brothers Santino and Rocco, and one white female, were at these grade levels and from varying parts of the Buffalo metro area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amir</th>
<th>Frederick</th>
<th>Santino</th>
<th>Izaiah</th>
<th>Jenna</th>
<th>Rocco</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>8th grader</td>
<td>7th grader</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the week, students became more involved in discussions and were not afraid to ask questions. One student asked about where discrimination exists in the 21st century as he didn’t understand exactly what was being discussed, a question that led to a wonderful discussion about the parallels between the world Douglass and Sojourner Truth described and the contemporary world. This was one of many really outstanding questions or ideas prompted by students. They enjoyed Gettier’s counterexamples, taking seriously the idea of knowledge as we know it being problematized and wanting to work around it. They also took to the application of
various ethical theories to various ethical dilemmas quite well, picking up on the strengths and weaknesses in the approaches and also offering their rationale for how they would respond to a particular dilemma. During the Mini Ethics Bowl, we had two other undergraduate Buffalo State Ethics Bowl participants work with students before they presented a pair of competing responses to a contemporary ethical issue. By the middle of the week, I felt like I was working with a great group of undergraduates! We also had guest lecturers, including Julian Cole (introduction), Leigh Duffy (meaning of life), and Kimberly Blessing (On Bullshit) from Buffalo State, and Tanya Loughead (Rawls) from Canisius College.

The final presentations were all quite good and about different issues. Amir focused his presentation on why bullshit is incredibly prevalent and dangerous in our society, using an example from a sports media figure and defending Frankfurt’s definition of bullshit, concluding that with the growing presence of social media, clicks on websites and money are what drive people to accept bullshit now more than ever before. Jenna argued for the importance of math and why it should be taught at school. She argued that math is something that is used daily and thus necessary not only for being a good student but a good citizen as well. During the question and answer section of her presentation, she articulated that in order to be a utilitarian you would have to be able to calculate the amount of pleasure versus the amount of pain can cause doing a particular action. Santino created a defense for the Justified True Belief (JTB) theory of knowledge that Gettier critiques. He argued that Gettier did not include a premise in Smith’s rationale and if he did, that premise would only be a false belief. In the first example, Smith would have to believe that Jones is the man with ten coins in his pocket and he will get the job. According to Santino, this belief would be false and therefore not fall under the justified, true belief definition. Rocco presented on whether or not Vision (from the Marvel Cinematic Universe) should be considered a person, arguing that Vision is an elaborate computer program that did as he was told. Izaiah presented on another Marvel Cinematic Universe issue, which is if Thanos’ snap that killed half of all life in the Universe was morally justifiable. He argued that this snap was not justified even if Thanos' theory was correct that the universe would be better off. He took the position that murder is wrong no matter what the potential benefits may be because we have a duty not to murder, similar to Kant’s view that we have a duty not to lie. Frederick presented on Rawls’ fairness principle, arguing that it was completely impractical because everyone is not going to participate in creating an equal society. Furthermore, he argued, there cannot be freedom in a society where there is a limit to what you can do. The variety in the topics people picked for their final presentations which was excellent because it showed that the program hit different interest for people throughout the week.

II. Evaluation

Just looking at the brief survey, we noticed some of the work we did seemed to stick. At the beginning of the week, we asked the students to take a brief survey asking them what their plans were for their future, how they defined terms like happiness, and what they considered the purpose of government to be. When the week ended, we gave the students the same survey with
added questions like did you discuss the program outside of the classroom with anyone and would you recommend this to other students. All of the students were able to recall definitions or concepts that we had given them as part of how they were answering their questions. The surveys also showed a change in how they thought about their future plans. In the entry survey, students had definite plans with little explanation as to why they were doing that other than they thought it was best. In the exit survey, students broadened their goals after high school, changed their ideas, or said they needed time to think about it. Five out of the six students stated that they had spoken to someone outside of the program about what we spoke about and mentioned using what we learned in their lives. A consistent critique of the program from the students was that it started too early and that we ought to have better snacks, both things to change for next year. Overall, the surveys indicated the students understood what we discussed about and were able to apply it outside of the classroom setting.

As a program, I thought it went really well. The students took to the material wonderfully and were engaged all week, my undergraduate mentee did a really great job of facilitating alongside me for the sessions, and students seemed to come away with an appreciation for philosophy. Moreover, the commitment to the learner centered approach proved to be successful with this group, as they each would be able to help steer the discussion and quickly learned to disagree with each other in a way that helped facilitate discussion, something I was really proud to see. Students wanted to be active participants and showed genuine interest because we gave them the freedom to explore that. This did lead to conversations about issues like immigration, capitalism, socialism, racism, and sexism, and they all handled them with care and maturity, even when offering radically different arguments.

However, the learner centered approach can be difficult when it is possible to veer completely off schedule by following the topics that students want to discuss. As a facilitator, I erred on the side of caution and did not want to stray a student away from any philosophical topic if it came up in discussion, which led to conversations about metaphysics and epistemology issues such as substance dualism and Platonic forms, topics that were not on our initial schedule. It would be difficult to transition to different issues sometimes because students would continue to bring the conversation back to whatever they were speaking about. Having a discussion guide or handout to help guide students would likely have been a useful tool for refocusing or transitioning. Going forward with larger groups will require perhaps putting some boundaries on discussions or adjusting the schedule to fit in line with the interests of the group if it’s becoming that prevalent. Regarding group size, I would say that groups of six to ten students might be ideal – with fifteen to twenty students at one time, conversations can become unwieldy. That said, there are small group activities that can be utilized to help facilitate nuanced conversations with big groups.

The biggest issue was that we only had six students when I was hoping for ten to fifteen students. This was because of a lack of advertising in the right spaces early enough – Buffalo parents set their children’s summer schedules during the fall and advertising was not out until the
middle of the spring. I wanted to ensure that the program was going to be free for students to be able to attract as diverse a group as possible and prevent cost from being a prohibitive factor for an interested student, and so I waited to advertise until I secured some funding for the project. Going forward, we will be advertising for the 2020 Buff State Lyceum by November in order to be able to have ten to twenty students participate.

III. Funding Use

The support shown by the APA was immensely helpful for the program to be successful this year! The funds were spent on supplies for student activities, snacks for students throughout the week, and in purchasing 11”Buff State Lyceum” t-shirts, one for each participant and the guest lecturers. Because we only had six students, we only ended up using $445.20 out of the $1,000, though with another three to four students we would have exhausted the entire grant. I am sending the remainder back through the mail in a money order. Although students complained about snack quality, they did eat them up!

Snacks: Small cereal boxes, Fruit cups, Hummus and pita chips, Potato chips, Water, Gatorade

Supplies: Binders, Crayons, Pens and pencils, Construction Paper

Total for Supplies and Snacks: $129.87

T-shirts: Orange shirts, ETS Customs did the designing

Total for T-shirts: $315.33 (shirts were $40.33 to acquire and $25 per shirt designed)