This year, Warren Thimothe joined the PLUSS organizing committee alongside Bianca Waked, Corbin Covington, and Alexandre Vachon. And after two previous attempts, we were finally able to host the summer school in person (all the while taking necessary COVID-19 precautions). While Dr. Joy James and Dr. Esme Murdock were initially slated to join us in Ithaca, circumstances resulted in neither keynote speakers being able to join us.

However, this left more time for the organizers to work with the participants directly and informally discuss topics that might otherwise go unaddressed. There is reason to think that the lack of faculty member presence may have fostered greater intimacy in this year’s cohort insofar as the participants did not feel the need to perform or put their analytical skills on display in quite the same way. The conversations were lively, thoughtful, and more importantly, shied away from linguistic or class norms which can overtake philosophical spaces. As we explained in our Welcome Letter to all participants “[t]his summer school is meant to be academically enriching while also providing you with time to reflect on whether academic philosophy is the best avenue for you to pursue. In other words, we are not here to convince you to pursue graduate studies in philosophy. Our goal for PLUSS is to offer a space for students of colour to have honest conversations about academic philosophy, provide resources and information, and most importantly, not spend our entire week talking about philosophy. You’ll notice that the schedule includes a visit to the farmer’s market, a boat ride on Cayuga Lake, a visit to the Cornell Dairy Bar, and the “Resistance is Personal” exhibit at the Johnson Museum of Art.”

This year’s reading list focused on writings which emphasized the different dimensions of colonialism’s legacy. Our reading list included “Too Late: Racialized Time and the Closure of the Past” by Alia Al-Saji, “(Ab)Originalism and Canada’s Constitution” by John Borrows, “Indigeneity and US Settler Colonialism” by Kyle Powys Whyte, excerpts from The World & Africa by W.E.B. Du Bois and The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon, “Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics” by Axelle Karera, and “Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma” by Derrick Bell. We also included a number of sessions dedicated to how to apply/what an application generally require, external fellowships, and how to ask for letters of recommendation.

Our original evaluation plan considered the following: demographic information, application success of our participants, surveys providing insight into the
summer school, the yield rate, and the institutional support garnered from the relevant universities and/or departmental programs.

Demographic Information: 70% of the participants identified as a gender minority and 70% of the participants identified as members of the LGBTQ2SIA+ community. Every participant identified as a person of colour (with the majority of participants and organizers identifying as Black/African American). Half of the participants identified as having a disability and every participant was either enrolled at a minority serving institution, a public or state-funded institution, or they transferred from community colleges to four year degree granting institutions.

Application Success: Previous participants (PLUSS 2021 and PLUSS 2020) who applied to doctoral programs were successful in arguably the most competitive application cycles in years. Currently, PLUSS participants are completing fully funded PhDs at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, the University of Pennsylvania (joint JD-PhD), the University of California–San Diego, the University of California—Los Angeles, the University of California—Berkeley, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, University of Washington, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Others chose to apply to Master’s programs and secured full funding from the University of Victoria and Western Michigan University. Finally, other participants have chosen to begin law school across the United States and Canada. We anticipate that this year’s cycle will be equally successful and we will continue to work with interested participants throughout the application process.

However, our support with graduate applications always bears the caveat that participants should reflect on whether academic philosophy is a place where they can flourish philosophically and emotionally at the present time. Many participants have opted to join the work force with the intention of eventually applying to graduate studies, and others have left academic philosophy altogether. We take these decisions to be a final (and perhaps our most important) marker of success.

Post-PLUSS Survey: Responses to the survey were overwhelmingly positive. In asking our participants to provide evaluations, we sought to assess the efficacy of our logistical and programmatic changes. When asked how they would describe their overall experience, every participants submitted responses which echoed the following: “Incredible! I enjoyed every aspect of the experience and would do it all over again.” “Incredible. Amazing. Exceeded all my expectations. This is not hyperbole.” “Incredible. Scary and intense, but so so incredible.” “Incredible. Couldn't be more grateful to be part of PLUSS.” “My overall experience at PLUSS was incredible. It was enriching in several ways. Everyone who is apart of PLUSS 2022 is amazing.” These responses, coupled with other responses pertaining the success and
possible improvements to the programme, indicate an abundantly positive academic and social experience.

Yield Rate: Given that we were beholden to the costs of housing and feeding participants, the number of participants dropped from 20 (which was feasible online) to 10. However, we covered participant lodgings and food expenses in addition to reimbursing up to 500$ for travel expenses per participant. While one participant could not attend due to an unfortunate misunderstanding, every other invited applicant was able to attend the summer school.

Institutional Support: After securing generous donations from the Sage School of Philosophy, Cornell’s Ethics and Public Life Program, and Cornell Law School in addition to the APA’s Diversity and Inclusiveness Grant, we were finally able to use all the funds for the program. In addition to financial support, faculty members and the administrative staff members were generous with their time and efforts in bringing this project to fruition. Cornell University’s Sage School of Philosophy was especially supportive and deserves noted thanks, especially Dorothy Vanderbilt and Rachana Kamtekar.

Via an executive decision by the organizing committee, we have decided to put PLUSS on hiatus for the next few years due to external circumstances. However, we have received confirmation that the Marc Sanders Foundation is interested in supporting our program with some small changes, which means that PLUSS will be returning to further support from professional philosophers and academic institutions. This support is not only an indication of the success of the PLUSS programme model, but also a testament to all the hard work put in by the organizers over the past three years.

With the care and hard work of Corbin Covington, Warren Thimothe and Alexandre Vachon, this program and the community it generated have grown beyond all expectations and impacted the life of so many aspiring philosophers. For their work, efforts, and most importantly, their friendship, I am profoundly grateful.

Respectfully,
Bianca Waked on behalf of the 2022 Organizing Committee