Dear Selection Committee,

It is my honor to nominate Dr. Kristopher Phillips for the APA’s Prize in Excellence in Philosophy Teaching. Dr. Phillips is an accomplished instructor who works tirelessly to engage a diverse body of students in shared philosophical exploration. In virtue of his excellence in undergraduate and pre-college philosophy teaching, his creative and effective use of high-quality pedagogies, and his broader impact on the quality of philosophy through service and research, Dr. Phillips is an exceptional candidate for this award.

**Excellence in undergraduate and/or pre-college philosophy teaching**

In nine years at Southern Utah University (SUU), Dr. Phillips won nearly every teaching award SUU has to offer. In 2016 he was awarded the *SUU Athletics Most Valuable Professor Award*. In 2018 he earned the *SUU College of Humanities and Social Sciences Innovative Pedagogy Award*. In 2019 he was awarded the *SUU Distinguished Educator Award*. Finally, in 2020 he was a finalist for the student chosen *Professor of the Year* and was chosen to present the *SUU Grace A. Tanner Distinguished Faculty Lecture*. Dr. Phillips was further a finalist for the *APA /APPT Prize for Excellence in Philosophy Teaching* in both 2021 and 2022.

Dr. Phillips may, additionally, be the university instructor most committed to pre-college philosophy education in the nation. While still a graduate student at the University of Iowa, Dr. Phillips co-founded the Iowa Lyceum, a free week-long summer program that teaches philosophy to junior-high and high school students. After earning his PhD, Dr. Phillips has coordinated and taught the Utah Lyceum every year since he founded it in 2015. In 2017, Dr. Phillips helped graduate students establish the Western Michigan Philosophy Lyceum, which has run each summer since his visit. Several of the graduate students with whom Dr. Phillips has worked on pre-college philosophy initiatives have gone on to found programs of their own including: the So-Cal Philosophy Academy (California Lutheran University), the Hilltopper Philosophy Academy (Western Kentucky), and the University of Utah’s Lyceum program. He’s also consulted with faculty at California State University
Northridge, Portland State University, and Tuskegee University to help create pre-college initiatives at their schools.

**Creative and effective use of high-quality pedagogies**

Dr. Phillips uses a range of creative and effective high-quality pedagogies. Dr. Phillips’ pre-college Lyceums focus on three texts, selected yearly. Students read a text on value theory, a text on political philosophy, and a text on metaphysics or epistemology. Each year at least one of the texts is a dialogue. The dialogue serves, not only as a comparatively accessible introduction to philosophy, but as a challenge to his pre-college students’ tendency to think of books as mere repositories of facts.

Dr. Phillips’ dialogical pedagogy plays out at three distinct levels. First, he teaches pre-college students to see texts as being in conversation with themselves, as when an author introduces and responds to a criticism. Dr. Phillips further teaches students to understand texts as being in dialogue with one another. This is the familiar back and forth we see both in published philosophy and in broader cultural dialogue. Finally, Dr. Phillips teaches students to engage in face-to-face philosophical dialogue.

This approach to pre-college education—embedded in all the Lyceums—encourages pre-college students to engage in philosophy. Students come to see philosophical work, not as unfamiliar and calcified edifices of an inaccessible academic or cultural class, but as a dialogue in which they are invited to engage to and to which they have valuable insights they can add.

Dr. Phillips’ dialogical approach to pre-college education not only encourages students to engage in genuine philosophical exploration, it further aims to cultivate reasonableness. Dr. Phillips’ understanding of reasonableness primary draws on the work of Michael Pritchard and involves three distinct features: (a) the ability and willingness to understand and appreciate the viewpoints of others, (b) the willingness to be influenced by those viewpoints, and (c) the willingness to have one’s mind changed by others. Dr. Phillips’ dialogical approach to pre-college education aims to foster reasonableness, thus understood, in each of his students.

Dr. Phillips’ approach to the Lyceums illustrates his scaffolded approach to teaching. Smaller lessons, e.g., seeing texts as in dialogue with themselves and in dialogue with other texts, build toward more significant and abstract pedagogical goals, e.g., the inculcation of reasonableness.
Dr. Phillips' innovative approach to pedagogy is not, of course, limited to pre-college education. In 2019 Dr. Phillips received a Curriculum Innovation Grant that supported his efforts to decolonize his *Introduction to Philosophy*. As part of this pedagogical overhaul, Dr. Phillips reworked his approach to teaching philosophical problems related to identity. Rather than focusing exclusively on the standard question of numerical identity—what makes us the same through time—Dr. Phillips drew on a range of authors, including Brison, Jeffers, and Corvino, to draw students into philosophical engagement with questions of identity formation.

This shift in course content was mirrored by a shift in Dr. Phillips' learning outcomes. In addition to fairly traditional learning outcomes for philosophy courses, Dr. Phillips now includes *epistemic humility* and *sense of self and others* among the primary goals of his courses. These learning outcomes reflect Dr. Phillips' view that philosophical exploration can be truly transformational, outstripping mere intellectual development.

More recently, and in response to psychology literature emphasizing the ways in which pursuit of grades can impede student learning, Dr. Phillips has moved toward *ungrading*. On this model of assessment, grades are determined in collaboration with each student and reflect a holistic determination of progress and intellectual engagement. Dr. Phillips encourages students to think of his classes not as a step on the way to a degree, but rather as an opportunity to cultivate character virtues (whether intellectual, moral, or civic). By removing grades and motivating students to work for their own development, Dr. Phillips hopes to help students develop the stable dispositions necessary to flourish and to engender lifelong habits of learning.

Importantly, Dr. Phillips' approach to pedagogical revision is not limited to including voices from marginalized demographics that engage with the traditional Western philosophical canon. Rather, Dr. Phillips recognizes that the Western philosophical canon reflects the values and interests of a tightly constrained demographic group. Building an inclusive and supportive classroom environment requires going beyond merely including readings from a more diverse group of authors. It requires interrogating what topics we take to be philosophically central.

In a similar vein, Dr. Phillips rejects the survey-model approach to course design. For example, rather than attempting to cover the traditional canon when teaching Modern Philosophy, Dr. Phillips focuses on only three authors: Rene Descartes, Margaret Cavendish, and David Hume. By limiting the number of authors discussed, Dr. Phillips makes room for a richer and more detailed
understanding of philosophers as system-builders, rather than as one-trick wonders. Furthermore, the inclusion of Cavendish as the pivotal figure between Descartes and Hume centers the non-canonical work of a philosophical figure who has not received her due.

Yet all of the above understate the extent of Dr. Phillips’ pedagogical innovations. Dr. Phillips’ creativity with philosophical pedagogy stretches well beyond the limits of anything resembling a traditional philosophical class. As part of SUU’s Honors Program, Dr. Phillips taught a class on space that took an interdisciplinary approach, combining dance and philosophy. Throughout the course--taught largely in a dance studio--philosophical reflection on the nature of space was interwoven with and illustrated by students’ growing awareness of the way their bodies moved through and occupied space.

Though illuminating, such high-level descriptions of Dr. Phillips’ approach to teaching fail to adequately capture his commitment to engaging his students in philosophical exploration. I have had the opportunity to observe Dr. Phillips’ teaching on multiple occasions. When using the Socratic method, Dr. Phillips is an engaging lecturer who easily intermingles references to popular culture and self-deprecating humor with abstract philosophical discussion to create a learning environment that is comfortable and relaxed, intellectually enriching, and genuinely enjoyable.

Little better illustrates Dr. Phillips’ use of creative and effective pedagogies than my favorite anecdote from his teaching. Feeling that the dialogical tension between Descartes and Hume was flying under the radar, Dr. Phillips’ brought a copy of Descartes’ Meditations to class only to light it on fire while reciting Hume’s famous line: “If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.” This is a moment, and lesson about philosophy, that those students will never forget.

Broader impact on the quality of philosophy education through service and/or research

Not only does Dr. Phillips use a wide range of creative and effective pedagogies and excel at both college and pre-college philosophy teaching, he is continually working to improve the quality of philosophical education more broadly. In addition to his work with the Lyceums, Dr. Phillips’ further served on the APA Committee for Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy from 2015 through
2018. During this time Dr. Phillips chaired a sub-committee tasked with exploring the viability of, and developing a curriculum guide for, a potential Advanced Placement Philosophy course which would allow high school students to earn college credit through a high school philosophy course. He also organized a panel on the completed curriculum guide at the 2018 Pacific APA.

In 2015 Dr. Phillips established the annual SUU Undergraduate Philosophy Conference and has run it for the past nine years. In addition to overseeing the normal nuts-and-bolts of the conference, Dr. Phillips further guides students through the process of reviewing submissions and through the process of writing philosophical commentary. In the seven years the conference has run, it has grown from a small, regional conference in the intermountain west, to an international undergraduate conference, pulling submissions from Canada, Australia, Europe, and South America.

Dr. Phillips additionally serves as the Editor of *Precollege Philosophy and Public Practice*, an open access peer-reviewed journal dedicated to high-quality, interdisciplinary work in precollege and public philosophy. Having now published five volumes, the journal is growing in both reputation and visibility, and has become an important resource for those interested in the p4c and public philosophy movements. Having taken over as Editor in the summer of 2023, Dr. Phillips is working with his editorial team to expand the reach, visibility, and scope of the journal.

Dr. Phillips has further published a number of articles on both college and pre-college philosophical education. These include four peer-reviewed publications disseminating a range of Dr. Phillips’ pedagogical innovations, including an article discussing his interdisciplinary philosophy and dance class, defenses of the value of the liberal arts and philosophy, and multiple publications about the Lyceums. Dr. Phillips’ works in progress include a forthcoming chapter offering practical advice on how to employ dialogue in one’s teaching with the aim of cultivating virtues, a book manuscript on the intersection of metaphilosophy and philosophy of education, and a scholarly article discussing the impact of our metaphilosophical commitments on student uptake in introductory philosophy classes. Dr. Phillips’ academic publications are further supplemented by a host of non-peer reviewed publications—including multiple articles published in the APA blog, the Prindle Post, and the blog *Philosophical Percolations*—as well as by appearances on public radio discussing the value of a liberal arts education.

Conclusion
Dr. Phillips’ excellence in both college and pre-college philosophical education, his use of creative and effective pedagogies, and his broader impact on philosophical teaching establish him as an excellent candidate for the APA’s Prize in Excellence in Philosophy Teaching. It is my honor to nominate him for the award.

Sincerely,

Abraham Graber, PhD
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