2009 Report to the Board from the Committee on Philosophy and Computers

The official charge of the Committee on Philosophy and Computers (PAC) is as follows:

The Committee (created by the Board in 1985) collects and disseminates information on the use of computers in the profession, including their use in instruction, research, writing, and publication, and it makes recommendations for appropriate actions of the Board or programs of the Association.

The Committee addresses this charge by:
(a) Carrying out formal data collection, analysis, and reporting,
(b) Providing conference presentations at divisional meetings of the Association,
(c) Awarding the Barwise Prize and facilitating the recipient’s presentation at an APA divisional meeting,
(d) Maintaining relationships with other APA committees plus philosophically-oriented and computer-knowledgeable groups,
(e) Employing the APA Newsletter to inform and converse with members of the profession, and
(f) Developing auxiliary projects which increase the understanding of computers and their use within the profession and/or which produce recommendations concerning appropriate actions of the Board or programs of the Association.

Elaboration on activities in each of these categories for 2008-09 is provided below.

a) Carrying out formal data collection, analysis, and reporting
PAC’s charge centers around the collection and dissemination of information on the use of computers in the profession. Nevertheless, no formal mechanism supports the collection and analysis of data. To date, only one formal survey has been conducted in the 20+ year history of the committee.

b) Conference presentations at divisional meetings of the Association, and
c) Awarding the Barwise Prize
During the past year, PAC sponsored several sessions at divisional meetings. At the Central Division meeting, I chaired a session entitled "Online Courseware," which included Pat Hurley (San Diego), Wilfried Sieg (Carnegie Mellon), and Harriet Baber (San Diego).

Committee member Amy White (Ohio University, Zanesville) organized a session for the 2009 Pacific Division meeting on "Gender and Technology." Session participants included Committee member Harriet Baber (San Diego), Margaret Crouch (Eastern Michigan), and Lori Watson (San Diego). Also at this meeting, the Committee was scheduled to award the 2008 Barwise Prize to Terry Bynum. Unfortunately, due to a health-related issue Terry could not attend the meeting. This award has been rescheduled for the Central Division meeting in 2010.

d) Maintaining relationships with other APA committees plus philosophically-oriented and computer-knowledgeable groups
PAC cultivates relationships with organizations that can contribute ideas, encouragement, and/or resources to sustain Committee projects. In particular, PAC interacts with the membership of the International Association for Computing and Philosophy (IACAP). PAC members often attend the annual North American regional conference of IACAP, and PAC chair reports on Committee projects at that conference. IACAP is recognized as an affiliated group in each of the Association’s divisions and sponsors sessions at their meetings. Many IACAP members
are APA members who have an interest in seeing PAC projects thrive, and PAC endeavors to make use of this good will in developing and advancing its projects.

(e) Employing the APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Computers to inform and converse with members of the profession concerning computer-related issues.

Peter Boltuc (University Illinois, Springfield) continues as Newsletter editor. The APA Newsletter provides informative articles and important announcements. Peter has helped a great deal with the transition to a web-based format. He has also been extremely aggressive in pursuing original research papers for publication. The profile of the newsletter is rising, to the point where PAC is discussing with the APA the prospects of an online journal.

(f) Development of auxiliary projects which increase the understanding of computers and their use within the profession and/or which produce recommendations concerning appropriate actions of the Board or programs of the Association.

Major projects and/or initiatives under discussion include:

1) Making Electronic Pedagogical and Research Resources Accessible

This project aims at constructing an internet resource which would support teaching and research in Philosophy. Some materials related to this goal are currently available on the APA website, but much more should and can be accomplished in this direction. The Committee has also been discussing the prospects of an online archive for philosophical research, comparable to what mathematicians and physicists use.

2) Encouraging international participation in Committee-sponsored sessions. PAC values diverse perspectives on the nature of Philosophy and computing, particularly those rooted in distinct cultural and geographic backgrounds. The 2006 Eastern division meeting included a session designed by Committee member, Susan Stuart (University of Glasgow) in which participants were primarily European. PAC will continue to explore ways in which such diversity can enrich its activities.

In Sum: The goals, projects, and initiatives described above provide an overview of the Philosophy and Computers committee’s endeavors during the past year. PAC hopes that its efforts continue to provide a worthwhile service to the Association.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Byron
Chair, Committee on Philosophy and Computers

2008-2009 Committee Members
P-Harriet Baber (2009)
P-Jay Halcomb (2010)
C-Jerry Kapus (2009)
S-Garrett Pendergraft (2011)
E-Renee Smith (2011)
E-Amy White (2009)
C-Peter Boltuc (ex officio)