

# Report of the APA Strategic Planning Task Force

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## Members

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## Report

At its annual board meeting in November 2012, the board of officers of the American Philosophical Association voted to convene a strategic planning task force, charged with identifying three to six priorities for the APA to pursue over the next five years (2013-2018). The task force was instructed to take into account the reports made by earlier, specialized, task forces in 2012: the task force on membership and membership services, the task force on communication and publications, the task force on development, and the task force on governance and structure. All of these task forces identified serious issues in need of work. The strategic planning task force was instructed to think about the reports, discuss them, seek additional information, and determine priorities.

There are many areas in need of change and improvement. However, there are four areas in particular in which the APA is woefully behind: providing membership services in an efficient manner, data collection, development, and improving the public perception of philosophy. There are many policies that the APA can begin to implement due to their obvious usefulness to members of the profession, such as helping to streamline the job application process. Some policies, however, require that the APA be able to ascertain the desires of its membership, and right now there is no efficient way for it to do so.

Further, in order to develop policy statements the APA, as well as groups run by APA membership, must be able to identify problems. There needs to be reliable data on the percentage of women in the profession as a whole, for example, and information on average salaries, employment expectations, reliance on adjunct teaching in departments, etc. The task force recommends that the APA pursue a strategy similar to that pursued by the Humanities Resource Center, which uses a departmental survey to gather original data on humanities departments in the United States. Such a survey could be tailored to philosophy departments, and would gather data concerning APA members and non-members. Initial information for the survey could be provided by purchasing the mailing list from the Philosophy Documentation Center. Because careful attention must be paid to both formulating questions for the survey, beyond the basic request for quantitative information, the task force suggests a two- to three-year timeline for the assembly and distribution of the survey.

Another serious problem, and one that interferes with the APA's ability to pursue and achieve its goals, is lack of development. The APA has no staff dedicated to pursuing funds. As the development task force recommended, the APA "should regularly and systematically seek charitable donations, small and large..." The APA has now added a donation tab to its website, which is standard for the websites of learned societies. However, the APA needs to be much more dedicated to pursuing funds from major donors. The APA is underfunded for an organization of its size, and without funds many of the important services it should be providing its membership will not be possible. The task force recommends that the national office, in consultation with membership and the divisional secretary-treasurers, develop a five-year plan to improve development. Because of space and budget constraints it may be advisable in the short run for the

APA to hire a consultant to develop a plan, though in the long run it would be much better to have a staff member devoted to development efforts.

Data collection and development are important because they provide information and resources needed to pursue other goals. One such critically important goal is to improve communication with membership as well as provide membership services efficiently. Already the APA has implemented positive changes that include informative emails to membership, as well as the executive director discussing issues of significance to membership on blogs. This has done much to improve membership awareness of what the APA is doing. The national office has also begun to improve services provided through the new APA web site, and has entered into a partnership with the PhilPapers Foundation that will also improve services to the APA membership. This is great progress. However, we do need to be more proactive in providing services. The national board should consider the possibility of establishing a committee for the express purpose to thinking creatively about providing services to membership. Another possibility is for the national office to solicit ideas directly from the membership via their web page. The new APA website, launched in July 2013, will increase efficiency in acquiring information about the services members want and need.

The communication task force recommended that the APA create an electronic magazine or newsletter that would be sent to members of the APA who sign up to receive it and that would keep the membership aware of the important work the APA does. The strategic planning task force recommends that the newsletter idea be implemented within a year. The national office has begun using Facebook to make announcements, but the newsletter would have a much wider audience.

One issue that the governance task force raised was the lack of an overall mission statement for the APA. This would help membership understand the function of the APA. The strategic planning task force recommends the attached mission statement and statements of purpose be adopted (see Appendix).

The mission statement is important for a number of reasons, not least of which is that it provides information to individuals who want to find out more about the APA and philosophy in general. The APA needs to be more aware of how philosophy is perceived by the public, make more efforts to improve the public perception of philosophy, and educate the public about the value of philosophy. An education in philosophy helps develop critical reasoning skills, for example, and this might be showcased on the APA website; the APA has recently posted information sheets that note how well philosophy majors score on tests of analytical reasoning, and more resources of this sort are recommended. Another way to reach out is to develop short videos that could be made available on YouTube which feature well known philosophers discussing their work. Another suggestion is to develop another newsletter or web publication for a more general audience. It might be advisable for this task to be handed over to a committee—such as the one on public philosophy or lectures, publications, and research.

Another vital issue the task force was asked to consider is obtaining feedback from graduate student members of the APA. Many suggestions have been made about how to address this issue. One is to have a graduate student member of the national board, though there are many logistical obstacles to this having to do with the additional expense of another national board member and deciding a fair selection procedure that would represent a sizable sample of the graduate student population. However, the national board could also authorize a graduate student caucus or committee, provide it with some financial support, and perhaps authorize it to submit a report to the national board and petition the APA on behalf of graduate students.

The strategic planning task force thanks the board of officers for recognizing the importance of strategic planning and for its commitment to the long term health of the APA and the profession. The members of the task force are confident that if the recommendations contained in this report are implemented, the APA will be in a stronger and more stable position by 2018, when the next strategic planning effort is to be undertaken.

## Appendix

### APA Mission Statement

The American Philosophical Association promotes the discipline and profession of philosophy, both within the academy and in the public arena. The APA supports the professional development of philosophers at all levels and works to foster greater understanding and appreciation of the value of philosophical inquiry.

### Principal Activities of the APA

#### Scholarship

The APA supports scholarship by producing a variety of publications such as the *Proceedings and Addresses*, which is of general interest to the philosophical community; a scholarly journal, the *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*; and newsletters on topics of interest to different subgroups of the association. It sponsors conferences and conventions, including three annual divisional meetings. It also provides occasional grants for specialized projects and conferences, and supports smaller, more focused, philosophical associations. The association fosters international cooperation, working with foreign counterparts on issues of common concern. It gives a variety of prizes and awards for philosophical excellence and contributions to the profession.

#### Teaching

The APA supports the development of teaching and dissemination of teaching materials and techniques at all levels and provides support for efforts to teach philosophy in primary and secondary schools. It publishes a newsletter on teaching philosophy and sponsors sessions on teaching at divisional meetings.

#### Career Development

*PhilJobs: Jobs for Philosophers*, a joint project of the APA and the PhilPapers Foundation, informs prospective job seekers about the availability of academic positions and post-doctoral fellowships in philosophy. In keeping with APA support for fair equality of opportunity in hiring, departments that advertise in *PhilJobs: Jobs for Philosophers* must attest that they do not discriminate against members of underrepresented groups. The APA provides resources for interviewing job candidates at divisional meetings. It collects benchmark data on the profession and fosters inclusiveness by providing grants for programs that promote diversity outreach. It also provides information about careers outside the academy.

#### Advocacy

The APA is active in the defense of professional rights of philosophers. It advocates for part-time and under-employed philosophers and for philosophers whose professional rights are at risk, and it provides assistance to departments threatened by lack of institutional support. The APA works with the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and like organizations and their international counterparts on issues of common professional and educational concern. It underwrites activities fostering interest in and appreciation of philosophy in the wider community. The APA also represents the discipline in a variety of public fora, providing a voice on public issues relevant to philosophy.