

Report to American Philosophical Association
Results of APA grant
University of Memphis, Department of Philosophy
Philosophical Horizons Grant Proposal
Fall 2010

The Philosophical Horizons initiative (PH) of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Memphis was launched in 2008 as an extension of our department's commitment to increasing diversity within academic philosophy. The primary aim of PH is to introduce the history and practice of philosophy to Memphis children, particularly those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, and to those schools that are the least likely to have the resources to implement Philosophy for Children into their curriculum. In doing so, we hope to provide a qualitatively different educational experience for these students and recruit young students to philosophy. During the 2009-2010 academic year, financial assistance from the American Philosophical Association played an integral part in achieving these aims.

Since its inception in 2008, PH has grown to partner with six Memphis schools, grade levels ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade. During the 2009-2010 academic year staff from the Department of Philosophy at the University of Memphis offered a university level course—Philosophy 1102, Values and the Modern World—to 40 students (juniors and seniors) at Booker T. Washington High School. Through a partnership with the University of Memphis Dual Enrollment Program, high school students fully participating in the course received academic credit toward an undergraduate degree at the University of Memphis.

Our class culminating experience—made possible through the financial assistance of the American Philosophical Association (APA)—was an essential part of the 2010 PH initiative, allowing us to introduce our high school students to higher education and increase their interest in the practice of philosophy. Through the sponsorship of the APA, we were able to develop a three part culminating experience: first, students were transported to the University of Memphis for a guided tour of a university campus; second, following their tour, PH students attended a private stage performance of Plato's *Apology* by Emmy-award winner Yannis Simonides; third, following the performance, PH students attended a private lunch with Mr. Simonides to discuss the *Apology* and his stage performance of this classic text.

The culminating experience had an important impact on our PH students and our project aim as a whole. First, Plato's *Apology* is one of the primary texts used in our work with PH high school students. Viewing the stage performance of this work allowed the students to draw deeper, philosophical connections to the *Apology* and the importance of the practice of philosophy as discussed by Socrates. In class periods following Mr. Simonides' performance student interest in the *Apology* (and in Plato's dialogues generally) increased substantially, as did the philosophical quality of our discussions of these texts. Second, students were extremely excited about having the opportunity to attend an event on a university campus, an excitement that ran over into many of our subsequent class periods. Many of our students will be first generation university students; for many students attending this event was a unique and memorable experience. Third, following the performance of the *Apology* students had a private

lunch with Mr. Simonides and were able to engage in extended philosophical discussion. Students were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the text and gain a truly special learning experience from a great performer and scholar of Plato's dialogues. Finally, given that Mr. Simonides gave an encore performance we were able to invite many community members to our campus to enjoy the performance and learn more about the PH initiative. This event led to more contacts, which, in turn, have brought new partnerships for the PH initiative in the 2010-2011 academic year. Our undergraduate majors and minors also benefitted a great deal from the performance. Mr. Simonides was very generous with his time and met with our undergraduate Philosophy circle and honor students during his stay.

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