Undergraduate Conferences as High-Impact Practices with an Impact on Gender Parity

W. JOHN KOOLAGE
Eastern Michigan University

DANIELLE CLEVENGER
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Abstract: There has been a recent explosion of undergraduate philosophy conferences across the United States. In this paper, we explore undergraduate conferences along three lines. First, we argue that, as a well-designed learning activity, undergraduate conferences can serve to increase gender parity in philosophical spaces—a widely accepted and important goal for our discipline. Second, we argue that this increase in parity (and other beneficial learning outcomes) is due, at least in part, to the proper design of undergraduate conferences as High-Impact Practices. Our empirical work on our own undergraduate conference demonstrates that properly designing the conference as a High-Impact learning activity does, as expected, benefit underserved student populations, including women. Additionally, the study also revealed unexpected opportunities to intervene on student learning. Third, we argue, also in line with our data, that undergraduate conferences occupy a previously taxonomically unrecognized grouping (Culminating Events) among recognized High-Impact Practices.

Introduction

We begin our paper by addressing the literature on gender imbalance in philosophy at the undergraduate level. This serves to motivate and frame our discussion of undergraduate conferences as sets of interrelated learning activities, some of which can (and should) be directed at addressing the disparity between men and women in philosophy spaces. We then turn to the idea that undergraduate conferences can (and should) be designed as High-Impact Practices (HIPs). HIPs are a type of engaged learning experience identified by George Kuh in 2008 that have garnered a good deal of research and curricular design atten-

tion.[1] Most notably, HIPs have been shown to have greater benefits for traditionally underserved student populations, including women, and are associated with a diverse range of highly desirable student learning outcomes including, educational, professional, and personal gains.[2]

In 2015–2016 we designed and implemented a survey of our own undergraduate conference, Eastern Michigan University's Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy (UCiP).[3] Our study yielded a number of interesting results suggesting that undergraduates conferences can (1) be used to address the disparity between men and women in philosophy, (2) be successfully designed as HIPs, and (3) occupy an unrecognized taxonomical space among named HIPs, namely Culminating Events. Additionally, we note some of the other learning opportunities for intervention that emerge from culminating events.

Inclusive Excellence

Unfortunately, it is no secret that historically, and currently, women in philosophy are discriminated against. As Sally Haslanger expresses it, "There is a deep well of rage inside of me. Rage about how I as an individual have been treated in philosophy; rage about how others I know have been treated; and rage about the conditions that I'm sure affect many women and minorities in philosophy, and have caused many others to leave."[4] Women in philosophy have disproportionally low representation in employment, authored articles in top journals, graduate programs, and undergraduate majors.[5] Additionally, they are still regularly confronted with blatant discrimination, sexual harassment, hostile work environments, and more.[6] With such disparities, it is not surprising that the state of women in philosophy has drawn attention.

A number of hypotheses and strategies have been developed in attempt to explain and respond to these injustices. Non-conscious bias in the form of schematic reasoning is one popular theory. Schemas are entrenched, non-conscious frameworks that help an individual quickly process and categorize new perceptions; in short, they are cognitive shortcuts that reduce the amount of mental work needed to understand a situation. Common examples include stereotypes, archetypes, scripts, and social roles. Unfortunately, schemas are notoriously difficult to identify and change. They can lead to things such as confirmation bias, wherein cases that support or agree with the schema are noted and those that don't are forgotten or altered to fit with the schema. The idea is that schemas, with their role in interpreting behavior, are responsible for much of the discrimination against women. Traditional Western philosophy identifies with stereotypically male qualities such as the rational, objective, cognitive, and individual, as well as stereotypically male modes, such as competing, attacking, and demolishing. This is

troublesome because these qualities map on to direct dichotomies in gender roles. As a result, women, who are more likely to perceived through schemas, are even less likely to be seen as fitting with or for work in philosophy.[7] In short, if "good" philosophy is identified with solely masculine traits and modes of being, it is unlikely to be conducive to those who are feminine. Even if philosophers are not consciously holding these prejudices, schematic reasoning threatens all judgements, especially those made under non-ideal conditions.[8]

Another possible explanation for the dramatic underrepresentation of women in philosophy points to a pre-university effect.[9] This hypothesis provides evidence that even before taking an introductory course women are less likely to be interested in philosophy, less self-confident regarding philosophy, and less likely to imagine themselves as philosophers or see themselves as having commonalities with their instructors.[10] This suggests that female underrepresentation is a problem larger than the classroom. Calhoun suggests that one major pre-university effect might be the gendered workforce.[11] She explains that philosophy is advertised to relate to male dominated professions such as law, business, management, and government, and ignores typically female dominated professions such as nursing, education, parenting, or activism.

Interestingly, despite numerous hypotheses regarding female underrepresentation in philosophy, suggested interventions tend to converge on salient points. First, it is generally agreed that we, "can't just add women undergraduates and stir."[12] Simply pulling more women into the current context of philosophy is unlikely to do anything more than increase tokenistic exceptions to the rule. Rather, we need to focus on actively degendering the schemas surrounding philosophy before and after students enter the university, building programs that value feminine interests and career trajectories in philosophy, and purposefully reinforcing the confidence and competence of philosophers that pursue these non-traditional choices. To achieve these goals Calhoun and Halsanger suggest numerous strategies: use images of women to represent philosophy, teach classes with solely female authors (without it being a feminist course), include female dominated careers when advertising philosophy, introduce counterstereotypical role models, encourage identification with groups that are not negatively stereotyped (i.e., instead of gender divisions encourage identification with another group), and encourage practices that treat intelligence as malleable, co-operative, and responsive to hard work. Additionally, Haslanger suggests explicitly making problematic schemas visible and defusing them, organizing spaces that value feminine aspects of philosophy, and organizing systems that provide for accountability and support in these endeavors.

In order to combat these prevailing associations and problems in philosophy, EMU's UCiP is intentionally designed as a cooperative

endeavor, which results in it being aligned with several of Haslanger and Calhoun's suggestions. The most notable way the conference has been intentionally designed, in light of these concerns, is in our reframing of the commenting process. Traditionally, the commenter is seen as adversarial and critical. We have reconceptualized the role of the commenter as an individual whose primary goal is to help the audience understand and engage the speaker's work. We have a unique opportunity to do this and have even developed instructions to help commenters understand their role in this way.[13] While this does not preclude identifying and suggesting areas for philosophic improvement, it does change how these critiques are intended, presented, and accepted.

Over the past two years, women have made up 66.6 percent of the organizing committee, and, this past year, there were equal or more women at every level of the organizing committee, including the levels of faculty advisors and graduate student managers. Because the planning committee is highly visible and active in helping students before and during the conference, the women on this team provide excellent and easily observed counterstereotypical role models. Also, all conference communication is purposefully designed to avoid gendered language and conceptions. Simple examples of this include using, "Greetings Philosophers" and avoiding titles such as Miss or Mister in conference email and programming.

Another way UCiP aligns with these recommendations is through two interventions in the review of submitted papers. Due to the evidence regarding schematic reasoning, all paper submissions are blindly reviewed by at least two reviewers. Implementing a blind review process helps minimize the chance that reviewers are being affected by nonconscious biases. By removing information, such as names, which tend to be gendered, there is less irrelevant information for the reviewer's schemas to engage, thus reducing the number of biases affecting the process. Additionally, the review committee is selected to be diverse along a number of domains, including gender and philosophic interest. This helps ensure that all types of philosophy, including those that are commonly or unfairly overlooked or dismissed, are valued in the review process.

If Haslanger and Calhoun are correct, introducing interventions aligning with these suggestions to the conference should result in an increased number of women involved with conference. This claim is explored more thoroughly later in the paper, using empirical data from the 2015–2016 iteration of UCiP. We find that such interventions are effective in addressing the gender disparity in philosophy. Prior to that, however, the next section explores another reason the conference is effective in addressing this disparity.

High-Impact Practices

In addition to the interventions suggested by Calhoun and Haslanger, literature from the scholarship of teaching and learning provides another way by which the concern of gender disparity in philosophy might be addressed—High-Impact Practices (HIPs). As previously noted, HIPs are educational practices that not only engage and challenge students, but have empirically demonstrated their efficacy in achieving deep learning. HIPs are one of a number of fundamental tenets of the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative.[14] This type of learning activity is of particular note here because, while HIPs are proven to benefit all students, they are *more* beneficial for students belonging to historically underserved populations.[15] These populations include first generation college students, students from poor socio-economic backgrounds, students of color, and women. The goal of implementing these practices at an institutional level is to ensure that all of America's extraordinarily diverse students gain the economic, civic, and personal benefits of a college education. This means that if one can engage students belonging to these backgrounds in HIPs, they are more likely to overcome some of their systematic disadvantage. Common HIPs include activities such as, undergraduate research, learning communities, writing intensive courses, and common intellectual experiences.[16] Their learning outcomes include increased retention, higher rates of graduation, greater chance of enrolling in graduate school, and increased grade point averages. Furthermore, they also include less traditional (but highly desirable) outcomes such as, greater tolerance for different peoples and reduced stereotyping behaviors, perception of campus as more supportive, increased curiosity, and greater gains in social and multicultural engagement.[17] The research associated with HIPs demonstrates that inequalities and injustices in higher education, such as the gender disparity so prevalent in philosophy, can be addressed by reframing and redesigning learning activities. Thus, if one can redesign curricular and co-curricular activities as High-Impact activities one should be able to see a difference in the way those activities benefit *all* students.

UCiP Is HIP

Though conferences are not normally identified as HIPs, our experience demonstrates that it is possible to focus on them as a teaching and learning opportunities, and, thus, shape them for the purpose of learning. This is the first conceptual move that must be made to see UCiP as HIP. However, beyond being a learning activity, HIPs are a particular type of engaged learning activity. Kuh and O'Donnell sug-

gest that what makes HIPs such effective learning activities is that they have a significant number of the following key properties:

- Performance expectations are set at appropriately high levels;
- There is significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time;
- Faculty and peers interact about substantive matters;
- Students are exposed to and contend with people and circumstances that differ from those with which they are familiar;
- Provision of frequent, timely, and constructive feedback;
- Students are offered periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning;
- Students are given opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications;
- Students are provided opportunities for public demonstration of competence.[18]

UCiP has, by design, the following HIP properties. First, performance expectations are set at appropriately high levels. Our advice for speakers and commenters set appropriately high standards. Also, our vetting process is selective, bringing in quality papers nationally and internationally. Second, students are exposed to and contend with people and circumstances that are unfamiliar. Students travel from around the country and abroad to attend UCiP, which differs from their regular educational environments. Additionally, they interact with thinkers from very different programs and cultural backgrounds. Third, students are, perhaps obviously, provided with the opportunity for public demonstrations of competence, by way of presenting, commenting, or participating in Q&A. Fourth, students are given opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications. Engaging faculty and peers at a professional conference is a real-world application of a number of competencies such as communication and research skills.

In addition to having the above properties by design, we created a survey to determine if UCiP displayed other known properties of HIPs. During the 2015–2016 iteration of the conference, we distributed two types of surveys, one for speakers and one for commenters. The self-survey questions consisted of Likert type and short answer questions asking conference participants to report if participating in the conference had an impact on a number of behaviors.

Through this survey, we found that UCiP has additional key properties of note. First, there is significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time. Students on average reported

having worked on their conference submission and presentation for at least a year. Additionally, as a result of conference acceptance, speakers reported moderately or very greatly increased use of professional skills at a rate of 71.4 percent, and moderately or very greatly increased time spent working on research at a rate of 85.7 percent. This means that the vast majority of our students asserted that their participation in the conference lead them to greater use of their professional philosophic skills and significantly increased the amount of time they spent working on their research.

Additionally, several Spearman's Rank-Order Correlations were conducted and yielded several interesting results. First there is a strong, positively correlated significant relationship between presenters' rating of increases in the quality of their communication with faculty members and increases in time spent on research as a result of their involvement in the philosophy conference at .692 (p < .01). Second, there is a strong, positively correlated significant relationship between presenters' rating of increases in the quality of communication with faculty and use of communication skills at .920 (p < .01). Third, there is a strong, positively correlated significant relationship between presenters' rating of increases in quality of communication with faculty and quality of communication with peers at .704 (p < .01).

What these correlations show is that students reported positive covariance among many skills and behaviors needed to be a successful philosopher in their work related to the conference. This data demonstrates that treating UCiP as a set a related learning activities and providing interventions, such as our guide for commenters, facilitates important learning necessary for their success as philosophers and students more generally. As a result, we conclude that undergraduate conferences can be High-Impact Practices, and, further, that UCiP is a HIP. As we note, this provides an a priori reason to build conferences in this manner to address the need for increased gender parity. Our study suggests that designing conferences as High-Impact Practices and along the lines suggested by Haslanger and Calhoun has the expected result of increasing gender parity, providing an a posteriori reason for this design principle. Further, our study reveals one unexpected result, a gap in the HIP taxonomy which is discussed in the following section.

Culminating Events

In this section, we make a distinction among summative learning experiences, such as Undergraduate Research, in order to highlight an overlooked category of practices. We call these overlooked experiences Culminating Events, and offer them as a novel category of HIPs for future research.

Perhaps the most well-known HIP that falls under the umbrella of summative experiences is a broad category of activities known as Undergraduate Research, the hallmark of which is scientific and creative scholarship. It is also widely held that this research should make an original contribution to the discipline.[19] In the undergraduate research process a student pursues a question of interest, typically guided by a mentor. In this way undergraduate research differs from traditional pedagogy and practice—students actively engage in the inquiry process, co-constructing knowledge with their mentor. Carolyn Merkel argues, "[t]he tutorial interaction between mentor and student around a problem of mutual interest is an ideal bridge on the teaching-research continuum. Most students learn best through hands-on exploration of new problems as they apply knowledge gained in the classroom to real-world questions."[20] Undergraduate Research has been found to improve student writing, communication, problem solving, and critical thinking skills, increase interaction with faculty and peers, and increase the likelihood of attending graduate school.[21] Additionally, students have also reported gaining professional proficiencies, including "thinking and working like a scientist" and "understanding professional behavior."[22] One longitudinal study on the impact of undergraduate research showed it was consistently a positive, significant predictor for critical thinking, inclination to inquire and lifelong learning, intercultural effectiveness, and socially responsible leadership.

Capstone Courses, another paradigm example of summative experiences, are described as curricular approaches to synthesizing content within a particular major. Common forms include senior seminars, comprehensive examinations, and senior theses.[23] In contrast to the broad learning outcomes for undergraduate research, capstones aim more narrowly, often focusing on the integration of knowledge and skills acquired in a specific major or discipline. Capstone experiences are implemented to attain numerous goals including, "to cement the student's disciplinary affiliation, to provide a rite of passage into the world of work or graduate school as a member of a distinct scholarly community, and to integrate the skills and knowledge acquired in the discipline."[24] Jean Henscheid found that the most common goal associated with Capstone Courses was integration and synthesis within the major, which was cited four times more often than the second most often cited goal, connecting the academic major to the work world.[25] This led her to conclude that Capstones "are generally designed to leave students with an understanding of and appreciation for single academic disciplines."[26] Unlike Undergraduate Research, Capstones tend not to be experiential, so they often lack "real-world" components. Students participating in Capstone Courses report limited impacts, with the primary benefit being increased cognitive gains.[27] A longitudinal study

done on HIPs supports this claim, providing additional evidence of Capstone Courses' narrow impact.[28] This suggests that Capstone Courses are effective HIPs, but only for specific, targeted learning outcomes.

We contend that what we call Culminating Events, of which UCiP is an example, are a different kind of summative experience, fundamentally different from Capstone Courses and Undergraduate Research. Perhaps little hangs on this taxonomic point, that Culminating Events represent a unique kind of HIPs, since undergraduate conferences are HIPs and have important learning outcomes and spaces for teaching and learning interventions. However, since the teaching and learning literature centers (mistakenly in our view) around named HIPS, such as Undergraduate Research and Capstone Courses, and not the critical properties of HIPs noted by Kuh and O'Donnell, we believe our taxonomic point has pragmatic merit. Our findings indicate that students report being accepted to our conference increased the time and effort they spent on their research and related skills. Unlike Capstone Courses, Culminating Events are not intentionally designed to integrate student learning across the major (for example). Further, while students do present original research, this is not the only learning that we have identified as associated with UCiP. As a result, the learning that occurs in a Culminating Event is can be quite different and distinct from that found in Undergraduate Research or Capstone Courses.

In the following section, we offer a brief history and description of UCiP. We also offer additional data from our study of the conference. From these, we argue that events, such as, but not limited to, undergraduate conferences, offer a substantial opportunity to address a problematic lack of gender parity in philosophy, in addition to other opportunities for teaching and learning.

UCiP as a Teaching and Learning Intervention and Related Empirical Results

UCiP began in 2011 as an extension of the Philosophy Club. At the time, the goal was to provide co-curricular experiences in philosophy. More recently, the focus is on providing an experience that mirrors professional philosophy and providing a forum where students can engage peers as speakers, commenters, and conference attendees.

UCiP is a two day, annual international event, with an optional welcome event held the night before. The conference hosts twenty to twenty-five student presentations and a keynote speaker, usually and early career faculty member. The conference sessions are organized in hour blocks, with concurrent sessions. Speakers have twenty-five minutes to present, followed by ten minutes of comments, and fifteen minutes Q&A overseen by a session chair. In 2017, the conference added

a pair of workshops—a follow-up session with the keynote speaker and a panel on the merits of graduate study in philosophy. Presenters and commenters are put in contact prior to the conference, and given instruction on their roles by way of email, peer interaction, and instructional documents housed on our website.[29] We have found having a centralized website to be incredibly useful in organizing the conference as well as a key teaching and learning tool.[30] Here speakers and commenters can find critical advice regarding their roles and responsibilities.

The conference has a second set of critical teaching and learning opportunities, since students are intimately involved in the planning and execution of the conference itself. At the graduate level, students play significant roles, including conference lead, paper submission vetters, and session chairs. At the undergraduate level, students team with graduate students and faculty in planning, marketing, and running the conference. Students also serve as ushers, fulfilling many responsibilities during the conference including, providing attendees with a friendly face, transportation advice, parking information, and answers to various questions. The selection of ushers and other leadership permits us to intervene on the conference experience as a teaching and learning object as well. As noted above, careful selection and training for students involved in these roles presents a dual opportunity for teaching and learning.

In 2015–2016, we designed a study to measure a number of dimensions of the conference.[31] This study yielded several noteworthy results. First, we discovered that 81.8 percent students used our suggested advice for commenters. This was significant because 81.8 percent of students reported having never commented prior to the conference, and 100 percent of the commenters indicated that they would comment again. These numbers highlight the opportunity UCiP presents to influence future professionals. Additionally, we know from personal experience that students turned to us or their peers when preparing for the conference. Although anecdotal, this provides further support for the idea that the conference is a significant teaching and learning opportunity for students who are just beginning to construct their professional identities.[32] Second, the conference has numerous coincident learning opportunities. For example, we have helped students learn how to request funding from their home institutions for travel, use public transportation in an unknown city, purchase plane tickets, book a hotel, and procure international visas (two presenters were from Egypt in 2015–2016). It is interesting to note that in the open response portion of the study, students overwhelmingly reported gains in overall confidence, and, more specifically, gains in confidence in handling "on the spot" questioning. This unanticipated, additional learning suggests that

there is the possibility to have students reflect on their learning during or after the event—an avenue that we have yet to pursue.

Although we cannot say for certain that our interventions caused women to feel more comfortable and satisfied with their experience at the conference, our data suggests that these practices address the disparity of women in philosophy. For instance, in the first two years of the conference, 2011 and 2012, the number of men presenting and commenting was greater, sometimes significantly greater, than the number of women participating. In the last two years of the conference, 2016 and 2017, after the introduction of the above interventions, the number of women presenting and commenting is greater than or equal to the number of men presenting and commenting. For specific percentages, see Figures 1 and 2 below. Additionally, there were no gender effects found in any of our data responses. For instance, women and men who commented were equally likely to comment again, and women and men who presented reported equal levels of enjoyment from presenting.

Our empirical work on UCiP and the research done on High-Impact Practices suggest that the gender parity we found is a result of the proper design of the conference as both HIP and conforming with the suggestions of Calhoun and Haslanger. While we are not able to provide a conclusive causal argument that our interventions lead to the parity we find in the more recent iterations of the conference, the increase in
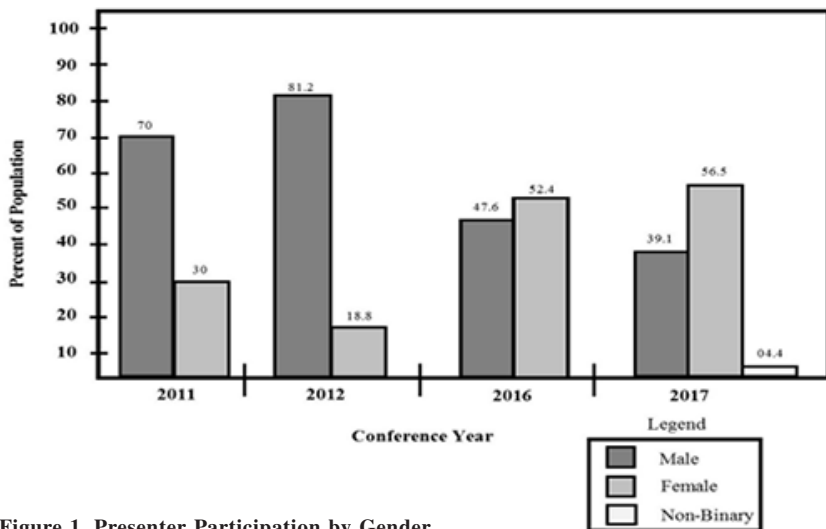

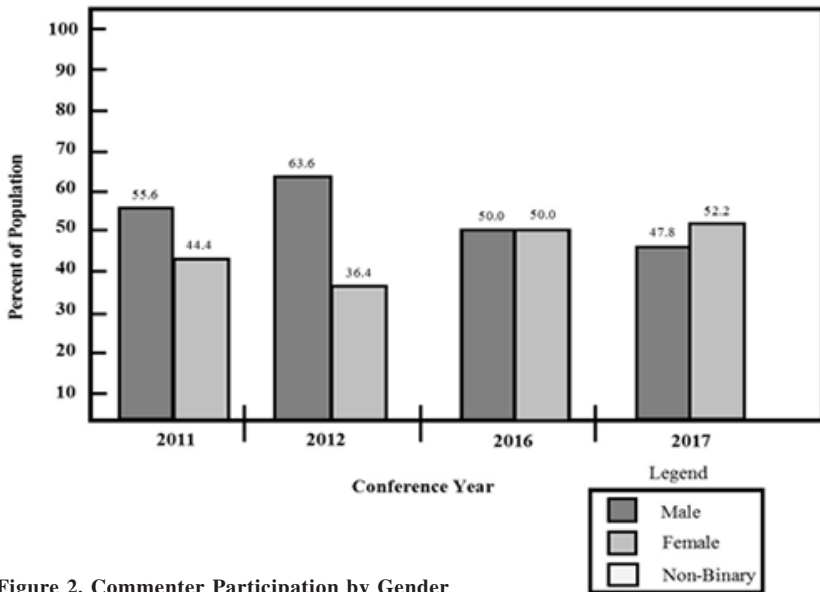Figure 1. Presenter Participation by Gender

Figure 2. Commenter Participation by Gender

gender parity after intervention on (1) the selection of leadership, (2) a blinding process for vetting papers and inclusive selection process for vetters, and (3) the commenting process (by way of instructions on how to comment that focuses on a cooperative set of outcomes) is difficult to explain otherwise. As a result, undergraduate conferences, and Culminating Events more generally, appear to be opportunities to expand student learning and address gender parity. This set of results suggest that the intentional design of these conferences (and similar activities) is worthwhile with respect to numerous goals—not the least of which is increased gender parity.

Conclusion

Our study's small sample size (N=19) suggests further research is required for large scale generalizations and conclusions. However, we do not contend that the social science suggests that our results are decisive. Instead, we used a key example, UCiP, and an empirical study, to carve out conceptual space for a new form of HIP—Culminating Events. These events are summative learning experiences in their own right, with demonstrable results and evidence for the possibility of teaching and learning intervention. Further, our work suggests that a growing number of undergraduate conferences in philosophy are critical targets for interventions aimed at changing the gendered culture of our own discipline.[33]

Appendix A: Speakers

How to give a talk (at the UCiP)

By: Professor W. John Koolage

So, you have been invited to give a talk at our Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy. In all likelihood, you have given some presentations before. A formal talk is not unlike the informal ones you have given in class; the main differences will be the setting is a bit grander, you will receive formal comments, and that questions from the audience will be less structured. In what follows, I offer some suggestions on how to prepare and deliver a formal talk (noting that these suggestions are tailored to our conference in particular).

Basics

Congratulations on the strength of your paper! Your creative work has been selected from a fairly large pool of other papers on the basis of its contribution to philosophy as a living endeavor. Giving papers is an important part of our discipline, and you have taken your first important step into the big game.

   Your job as a presenter is to convey the central ideas and argument(s) of your paper to the audience. Your first step in preparing your talk is to consider the fact that the audience at our conference, while trained in philosophy, has no expertise in the area of your work; unlike a presentation for one of your classes, your audience at the conference is not likely to have read the works you're drawing from, or even have attended basic lectures on the topic at hand. As a result, you will have to spend a bit more time on the basics, and a little less time on your more fine-grained points. You will likely have to cut most "asides" that appear in your paper from your talk; these are the sorts of things that may well come up during the Q&A.

   You can think of your role as one of teacher, as well as philosopher. What are the basic ideas your audience will need in order to follow your argument(s)? Is there any terminology you use that may be regional or idiosyncratic? Can you make the central argument of your paper in four to five steps? These organizing questions will help you make decisions about what to cut or add for the purpose of presenting your paper.

Details

First, take your talk seriously. A talk is not the same as a paper, and your submitted paper may need some tweaks to be a good talk. Your paper will soon be part of the enterprise of philosophy, and that is no

small thing. While your audience will exercise the principle of charity, as all good philosophers do, it is up to you to give them some ideas and an argument they can readily share with you—this will generate the best discussion and be the most rewarding for you own thoughts on the matter.

Second, you should practice the talk before you present. Here are two things that happen to almost all speakers:

1. Unless they have presented many times before, speakers over- or underestimate how long it will take them to get through their talk; and
2. while all speakers are nervous, a quick run through with friendly faces (even if it is just your own in the mirror) will help get the lead out of your speaking voice.

Third, it is a simple fact that a speaker always feel more nervous than they appear. These nerves are present in even the greatest public speakers; it's what you do with the feeling that is some importance. You should not focus on this feeling; you look fine to everyone else, believe me. Further, everyone knows that it is perfectly acceptable for a speaker to be nervous; they don't care that you are, and neither should you. If you can focus on your very interesting ideas during your talk, rather than your feeling of nervousness, you will be better situated to digress where necessary and rally when needed. Just do your best to try and ignore your feeling of nervousness—it is completely normal, and the audience is totally cool with it.

Fourth, you will receive formal comments on your paper. This is an odd experience the first time (and almost any time). Your commenter will be assigned well before your presentation time, and, in most cases, they should provide you with a written copy of their comments before your presentation time. There are a few things to say about this:

1. You are not getting the comments so that you can fix your paper prior to the talk—this is a huge no-no! You are getting the comments so that you may prepare a quick response. When the conference is well and done, you should use the comments to improve your paper, but your talk should be faithful to the paper you submitted.
2. The commenter will present his/her comments after you have completed your initial talk. During this time, you should sit in the speaker area. It is common for speakers (you) to take notes during the commenter's presentation.
3. When the commenter is done, you will have (roughly) five minutes to respond prior to the general Q&A—you do not need to respond to everything the commenter said. Commonly, speakers highlight one or two points from the

commenter for additional clarification or response. Your job is not to rebut everything the commenter said; your job is to indicate a direction for the conversation to follow. As a result, you might frame your response to the commenter as follows: "Thank you for all the thoughts, and the nice summary of my work. I would like to respond to (or clarify my position on) ____." From here, you will respond or clarify, as specified. Since you only have five minutes, you will have no choice but to be selective in your response, as I noted above.

Critical Points

You will have twenty minutes to present your talk. After this, you will receive you formal commentary; this usually takes about five minutes. You will also have five minutes to respond to the comments.

- It takes about two minutes to read a single, double-spaced, page (in regular font with regular margins). This means that you will only have time to present somewhere between eight and eleven double-spaced pages.
- Your number one goal is to provide the basic ideas and argument(s) of your paper. You will know you have achieved this goal if the audience is able to quickly ask questions that address your main ideas. I strongly suggest that before you prepare the talk version of your paper, you simply write down what you take to be the key concepts and an outline of what you take to be your master argument. These two simple "lists" will help you organize your talk.
- Your second goal is to receive as much useful feedback as possible. This is a goal that even the most experience presenters sometimes overlook. While it is nice to look good, to impress the crowd with your intellect, and/or devastate opposed positions, it is far more important to generate a talk that will garner you interesting feedback on your argument, future research, or ways to improve your current paper.

Other Thoughts

Be gracious. Philosophy's dialectical method has, traditionally, been understood in a more or less combative way. This is ridiculous; the goal is truth, not victory. You can learn from your peers, as much as they can learn from you. Take all questions and comments (even the oddly

critical sounding ones) in stride and respond with a level of humility (even to questions that may seem out of left field), and you will get the most out of discussion

Have fun! This conference is designed to be a place of collegiality and a nice first step into a community of thinkers that may help you for the rest of your academic life. Attend as many talks as you can, follow up after your own talk with people who interacted with your ideas, and enjoy the spirit of camaraderie that most professional conference aim to offer

Reach out to your own faculty mentors. The people who taught you want to see you succeed. If you are interested in getting help tailoring your talk, or thinking more about your paper, the very people who helped you the first time are likely to be interested in helping now.

Final Thoughts

We are excited to meet you and hear your paper! This conference exists only because of you, the speakers, but, not so secretly, it is designed for all students of philosophy. Your audience is truly waiting to hear what you have to say! Enjoy.

Appendix B: Commenters

How to comment on a paper

By: Professor W. John Koolage

So, you have been asked to comment on a paper at a conference. In all likelihood you have not done this before, and for many you have never seen it done either. In what follows, I offer some suggestions as to how to approach commenting at a professional conference.

Basics

Congratulations on becoming an important part of the creative output of an academic research program! Commenting on a paper is the next most important role to presenting a paper at a professional conference. Paper writers will be relying on you to do two things: (1) help the audience identify and understand salient features of the paper, and (2) be the key person to ask critical questions that will help the presenter think about, improve, and expand their paper. While this is a shock to most speakers, the audience at a conference might not be well equipped to help the speaker think about their paper critically. Of course, it is nice to simply provide new ideas to an audience, most speakers are actually looking for help in assessing the thoughts in their paper in terms of clarity and closeness to the truth. This is why your job is so important.

Details

First, you should take your job as a presenter seriously. This is especially important because commenters are also generating creative output. In many cases, commenters have been noted for their philosophic skills, thoughts, and critical abilities. In some cases, the commenter can be a greater benefit to an audience than the speaker themselves. As a result, you should dress the part of a professional, write your comments in a professional manner, and be kind and courteous to your speaker and the audience.

Second, you should invest some time in your comments. I recommend the following format for a five-minute commenting session; I also recommend that if you have ten minutes you simply double the formula below. (Five and ten minutes are common lengths for commenting.)

- Your number one goal is to help everyone understand the key ideas and argument in the paper. You should write roughly 1 page (double spaced) that summarizes the speaker's paper and identifies the central argument in the paper.
- Your second goal is to provide a professional critique of the philosophic ideas/arguments in the paper. In general it is best to focus on one or two "problem" areas for the speaker's paper. I recommend two, since this is more helpful to the speaker and requires slightly less work on your part (providing only one trenchant criticism will take you much longer, believe me). In practice, this amounts two writing roughly 2/3 of a page for each criticism/comment—for a total of, rougly, 1.5 pages.
- Your criticisms/comments are likely to be one of three sorts: (1) another author(s) has offered a competing account of phenomena the speaker is addressing, and in your opinion the other author(s) must be addressed by the speaker; (2) the speakers argument/central concept(s) contain a philosophical (logical or conceptual) flaw that you are prepared to explain; (3) the speaker has provided an incorrect/misleading/marginal reading of another author, and you are able to explain the standard/correct/less straw-person version of the author. In all cases, you need to be respectful of the speaker's intelligence, work, and motivation. You are simply helping them out, not trying to "get them."
- Finally, you should offer, roughly, ½ page of suggestions on how the speaker might "fix" their paper, other direc-

tions they may take the paper, and or thoughts on other problems they may solve with their key ideas/arguments.

Finally, remember that your comments are part of your own creative output; so, be sure to make them such that you are proud to present them in front of an educated set of peers.

Other Thoughts

Here are some final thoughts that might also be of some use in thinking about commenting.

First, people are typically focused on the speaker; in this way, you are simply helping the audience understand and think about the speaker's paper. This means, audience almost always view your work as good, since it helps them and since they're not there to evaluate you; this takes a lot of the pressure of speaking off of you.

Second, some commenters take the time to thank the speakers for their papers and to say a few words about the merits of the speaker as a thinker/person/contributor to the profession. This is by no means a requirement; in some cases this comes off as nice and thoughtful, in others it comes off as disingenuous.

Third, I cannot repeat enough that it is your main job to help the speaker. The best way to do this is in the part of your comments where you help the audience understand the speaker. That said, most speakers are extremely thankful for the fact you have read their paper and thought critically about their paper. It is very common for speakers to acknowledge commenters in the final versions of their paper. This is a good way to participate in the creative process.

Finally, commenting is an excellent way to impress people and make new contacts in a much lower stress way than presenting. Be your best self when commenting and people will seek out your thoughts in the future.

Final Important Note

Most commenters provide their speakers with a short summary of their critiques a couple of weeks before the talk. This gives the speaker some time to consider responses. It is considered very uncouth for the speaker to change their initial talk in line with the comments, but it is equally uncouth to blindside a speaker. Thus, I strongly recommend you get in contact with your speaker as soon as possible, and you provide them with some idea the line your critiques will take a week or two before the presentation.

Appendix C: Questionnaires

EMU Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy Presenter Questionnaire

1. What is your academic standing? (Check One)

O Freshman	O Sophomore	O Junior	O Senior	Other _____

2. How likely are you to pursue a graduate degree at the end of your undergraduate career? (Check One)

O Very Unlikely	O Unlikely	O Unsure	O Likely	O Very Likely

3. What gender identity do you prefer? (Check One)   O Male   O Female   O Non-Binary

4. Have you presented at another conference? (Check One)   O Yes   O No

5. Did you receive financial aid to attend this conference? (Check One)   O Yes   O No

6. Did you have a mentor in the process of creating your research paper? (Check One)   O Yes   O No

7. Where did you get the primary inspiration for your research paper? (Check One)

O Class Instructor	O Mentor	O Peer Group	O Program Requirement	O Other _____

8. What is the primary reason you decided to submit a research paper to this conference? (Check One)

O Interest in Topic	O Mentor Recommendation	O Professional Development	O Peers
O Program Requirement	O Resume Builder	O Other _____	

9. What/Who was the most helpful resource(s) in the process of creating your research paper?

_____

10. How rewarding did you find it to present your research paper at this conference? (Check One)

O Very Unrewarding	O Unrewarding	O Neutral	O Rewarding	O Very Rewarding

11. In comparison to other research papers you have written, did your paper for this conference increase….
    (Check One)

The quality of your communication with faculty members?	O No	O Little	O Moderately	O Greatly	O Very Greatly
The quality of your communication with peers?	O No	O Little	O Moderately	O Greatly	O Very Greatly

10. Looking back at your experience of commenting and preparing to comment, what aspect of the experience was most beneficial?

_____
_____
_____
_____

11. What/Who was the most helpful resource(s) when preparing your professional comments?

_____
_____
_____
_____

EMU Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy Commenter Questionnaire

1. What is the primary reason you decided to comment on a paper for this conference? (Check One)

⭕ Interest in Topic	⭕ Mentor Recommendation	⭕ Professional Development	⭕ Peers
⭕ Program Requirement	⭕ Resume Builder	⭕ Other _____	

2. Did you present a research paper at this conference? (Check One)   ⭕ Yes   ⭕ No

3. Have you prepared formal comments before? (Check One)   ⭕ Yes   ⭕ No

4. Would you comment again? (Check One)   ⭕ Yes   ⭕ No   ⭕ Unsure

5. Would you recommend this process to a peer? (Check One)   ⭕ Yes   ⭕ No   ⭕ Unsure

6. Which of the following did you use to prepare your professional comments? (Check One)

⭕ Consulted a Professional	⭕ Internet Search	⭕ Peers	⭕ Past Experience	⭕ Read Instructions

7. How rewarding did you find it to present your research paper at this conference? (Check One)

⭕ Very Unrewarding	⭕ Unrewarding	⭕ Neutral	⭕ Rewarding	⭕ Very Rewarding

8. Did formally commenting at this conference increase...? (Check One)

The frequency of your communication with faculty members?	⭕ No	⭕ Little	⭕ Moderately	⭕ Greatly	⭕ Very Greatly
The frequency of your communication with peers?	⭕ No	⭕ Little	⭕ Moderately	⭕ Greatly	⭕ Very Greatly

9. Did formally commenting at this conference increase...? (Check One)

The quality of your communication with faculty members?	⭕ No	⭕ Little	⭕ Moderately	⭕ Greatly	⭕ Very Greatly
The quality of your communication with peers?	⭕ No	⭕ Little	⭕ Moderately	⭕ Greatly	⭕ Very Greatly

10. Looking back at your experience of commenting and preparing to comment, what aspect of the experience was most beneficial?

_____
_____
_____
_____

11. What/Who was the most helpful resource(s) when preparing your professional comments?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Notes

The authors would like to thank a pair of anonymous reviewers, Mathew Dick, Dr. Chris Foreman, all of the participants in Eastern Michigan University's Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy, and especially all those involved in the 2015–2016 study.

1. Finley and McNair, *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement*.

2. Brownell and Swaner, *Five High-Impact Practices*, 1.

3. IRB# 87119, Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy Assessment and Research Project, Eastern Michigan University, PI Koolage, 2016.

4. Haslanger,"Changing the Ideology," 210.

5. Baron, Dougherty, and Miller, "Female Under-Representation," 330; Haslanger, "Changing the Ideology," 220; Calhoun, "Precluded Interests," 475.

6. Haslanger, "Changing the Ideology," 211.

7. Ibid., 213.

8. For evidence on the impact of schematic reasoning, see Halsanger, "Changing the Ideology," and Valian, *Why So Slow?*

9. Baron, Dougherty, and Miller, "Female Under-Representation," 346.

10. Ibid., 329; Calhoun, "Precluded Interests," 482.

11. Calhoun, "Precluded Interests," 478.

12. Ibid., 483.

13. For more on this, see the later section on Eastern Michigan University's Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy and Appendix B.

14. The Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative is an action plan developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities to support and reform

liberal education; Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices*, 9; Brownell and Swaner, *Five High-Impact Practices*, 1.

15.   Kuh, "Why Integration and Engagement are Essential," 27; Finley and McNair, *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement*.

16.   Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices*, 9–11.

17.   Kuh, "Why Integration and Engagement are Essential," 27; Finley and McNair, *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement*.

18.   Kuh and O'Donnell, "Taking HIPs to the Next Level."

19.   Hu et al., "Reinventing Undergraduate Education."

20.   Ash Merkel, "Undergraduate Research at the Research Universities."

21.   Brownell and Swaner, *Five High-Impact Practices*, 33.

22.   Ibid.

23.   Ibid., 38

24.   Henscheid, "Professing the Disciplines," 99.

25.   Ibid.

26.   Ibid., 1.

27.   Brownell and Swaner, *Five High-Impact Practices*, 39.

28.   Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, and Pascarella, "The Link between High-Impact Practices and Student Learning," 519.

29.   See Appendixes A and B for presenter and commenter advice.

30.   http://www.emuucip.com/.

31.   See Appendix C for the surveys.

32.   This idea mirrors the findings of Wiessner et. al., who studied their own teaching and learning intervention on professionals at professional conferences; Wiessner et al., "Creating New Learning at Professional Conferences."

33.   There are at least forty-five annual undergraduate conferences. http://www.that marcusfamily.org/philosophy/Amusements/UG_Conf.html.

Bibliography

Ash Merkel, Carolyn. "Undergraduate Research at the Research Universities." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 93 (2003): 39–54. https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.87

Baron, Sam, Tom Dougherty, and Kristie Miller. "Why Is There Female Under-Representation among Philosophy Majors?" *Ergo, an Open Access Journal of Philosophy* 2 (2015): 329–65.

Brownell, Jayne, and Lynn Swaner. *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion and Quality*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010.

Calhoun, Cheshire. "Precluded Interests." *Hypatia* 30(2) (2015): 475–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12149

Finley, Ashley Paige, and Tia McNair. *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement in High-Impact Practices*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2013.

Haslanger, Sally. "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone)." *Hypatia* 23(2) (2008): 210–23.
https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2008.tb01195.x

Henscheid, Jean. "Professing the Disciplines: An Analysis of Senior Seminars and Capstone Courses." The First-Year Experience Monograph Series, no. 30. (2000): 1–185.

Hu, Shouping, Kathryine Scheuch, Robert Schwartz, Joy Gayles, and Shaoqing Li. "Reinventing Undergraduate Education: Engaging College Students in Research and Creative Activities." *ASHE Higher Education Report* 33(4) (2008): 1–103.

Kilgo, Cindy, Jessica Ezell Sheets, and Ernest Pascarella. "The Link between High-Impact Practices and Student Learning: Some Longitudinal Evidence." *Higher Education* 69(4) (2015): 509–25. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-014-9788-z

Kuh, George D. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).

Kuh, George. "Why Integration and Engagement are Essential to Effective Educational Practice in the Twenty-First Century." *Peer Review* 10(4) (2008): 27–28.

Kuh, George, and Ken O'Donnell. "Taking HIPs to the Next Level." In *Ensuring Quality and Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale*, ed. George Kuh, Ken O'Donnell, and Sally Reed. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2013.

Kuh, George, Ken O'Donnell, and Sally Reed. *Ensuring Quality and Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2013.

Valian, Virginia. *Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999.

Wiessner, Colleen Aalsburg, Tim Hatcher, Diane Chapman, and Julia Storberg-Walker. "Creating New Learning at Professional Conferences: An Innovative Approach to Conference Learning, Knowledge Construction and Programme Evaluation." *Human Resource Development International* 11(4) (2008): 367–83.
https://doi.org/10.1080/13678860802261488

W. John Koolage is an associate professor of philosophy and the director of General Education at Eastern Michigan University. His research interests include general philosophy of science and philosophy of psychology, as well as the application of these to contemporary issues, such as climate change, gun control, and teaching and learning. E-mail: wkoolage@emich.edu.

Danielle Clevenger is a PhD student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She recently earned her M.A. in philosophy from Eastern Michigan University and lectured for the University of Detroit Mercy. She is fascinated by questions surrounding general philosophy of science, particularly those concerning evidence. She is also passionate about researching the efficacious teaching of philosophy, the role of movement in learning, and equity issues in higher education. E-mail: dclevenger@wisc.edu.