

Improving Student Learning and Student Retention at the Undergraduate Level

A Multi-Tiered RPG Initiative for Philosophy in the Core: Encouraging Students and Developing Community

REQUEST FOR CONTINUED FUNDING INTERIM REPORT FOR 2006-2007 YEAR ATTACHED

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Title of Proposal: A Multi-Tiered RPG Initiative for Philosophy in the Core:
Encouraging Students and Developing Community

Themes of Proposal: 1. Support for students in high enrollment courses
2. Fostering connections among students at the sophomore level
3. Improving advisement (a secondary theme)

College rating (approved; not approved) APPROVED

THE PROPOSAL

The Philosophy Department offers two high enrollment courses in the Core: Phil 1010 (Critical Thinking) in Area B and Phil 2010 (Great Questions in Philosophy) in Area C. Over the past four semesters, Phil 1010 has averaged 27.5% DFWs and Phil 2010 has averaged 24.5% DFWs. This rate of Ds, Fs, and Ws hinders the retention, progress, and graduation of students at Georgia State. We propose the following three-pronged approach to improve student learning in those courses and hence student progress toward graduation, as well as to foster a sense of community within the Philosophy Department & the University.

This proposal comes from our experiences with our 2006-07 RPG Grant. Two of the strategies employed there did not appear to work, but subsequent changes to one seem to be making a radical difference (the third strategy only began this spring, so currently lacks data). For details, see the attached Interim Report. The use of graduate students to assist in Phil 1010 and undergraduate students to assist in Phil 2010 appeared to have no effect in the Fall. However, for the Spring semester, we moved the undergraduates into the Supplemental Instruction Leadership Program run by the Office of Undergraduate Studies and are now seeing substantial positive effects (see “F” and the addendum to the attached Interim Report). Therefore, we here propose to redesign the Phil 1010 part of the program so that it follows the revised Phil 2010 model. The key helpful features seem to be the additional training of SILs and the requirement of having SIL sessions geographically and temporally near the classes they are designed to aid.

An RPG Coordinator. To supervise the initiatives below, we will continue to have a Philosophy RPG Coordinator (“the Coordinator”). The Coordinator will work with the Chair of the Department, the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), the Coordinator of Graduate Teaching (CGT), and the Director of the Supplemental Instruction Program in the Office of Undergraduate Studies (currently Peggy Ogden) to ensure that the proposed initiatives are properly carried out. The Coordinator will also teach a class for Undergraduate Supplemental Instruction Leaders, as described below. Finally, the Coordinator will prepare and submit any required RPG reports.

1. Graduate Supplemental Instruction Leaders (G-SILs) for Phil 1010. (This is the redesigned piece of our proposal.) In Phil 8970, the CGT currently trains philosophy MA students to teach Phil 1010. This program has been tremendously successful and will be expanded to improve retention. The CGT, in consultation with the Coordinator, will train 5 additional MA students chosen by the DGS and the Coordinator. These specially selected and trained MA students will each serve as SI Leaders for a section of Phil 1010. The G-SILs will:

- attend all class meetings of one section of 1010 (2 hours/week).
- hold 3 SI sessions or office hours per week.
- participate in the University training required to be SILs.
- take Phil 8970 (as per above).
- provide detailed comments on rough draft(s) of paper(s). Such peer editing has been shown to substantially improve student writing—this initiative should thus improve these students’ chances of successful progress at Georgia State.
- in consultation with the course instructor, offer further clarification of class material.
- indicate to the course instructor when the students may need further clarification.
- participate in “meet and greet” sessions to introduce themselves and encourage students to utilize their services.

The G-SILs will support up to 350 students per year (5 sections/semester of up to 35 students). The Coordinator and CGT will develop this training program to serve the needs of 1010 students.

Evaluation procedure: Immediately after each semester, we will collect and compare data concerning the DFW rates for 1010 sections with G-SILs and 1010 sections without G-SILs with the prediction and goal being that sections with SILs will have significantly lower DFW rates.

2. Undergraduate Supplemental Instruction Leaders (U-SILs) for Phil 2010. (This piece of our proposal is a refinement of the Phil 2010 program currently in place.) The Coordinator, in consultation with the DUS, will select 10 junior or senior philosophy majors per semester who were successful in Phil 2010 to serve as Supplemental Instruction Leaders for students in that course. The U-SILs will:

- attend all class meetings of one section of 2010 (3 hours/week).
- hold 3 SI sessions or office hours per week.
- participate in the University training required to be SILs.
- take a class with the RPG Coordinator (4980 if their first semester as an SIL and 4985 if an additional semester; the first will be 3 credits that count toward the major requirements and degree, the second will be 1 credit that does not).
- provide detailed comments on rough draft(s) of paper(s). Such peer editing has been shown to substantially improve student writing—this initiative should thus improve these students’ chances of successful progress at Georgia State.
- in consultation with the course instructor, offer further clarification of class material.
- indicate to the course instructor when the students may need further clarification.
- participate in “meet and greet” sessions to introduce themselves and encourage students to utilize their services.
- provide peer mentoring to other philosophy majors and potential majors (the DUS will inform all majors and interested parties who the SILs are and when they are available to discuss philosophy, the major, courses, future plans, etc.). This will supplement our recently initiated faculty advising program. (Majors are assigned a trained tenure-track faculty advisor to meet with regularly to discuss their progress and future in the major).

We expect the SILs will learn to do philosophy better as they participate in teaching it and that the experience will be intrinsically rewarding. This initiative should thus develop a core of majors active in the Department and mission of the University. This will develop a sense of community between the SILs and the students they serve, among the SILs themselves, and between the SILs and the faculty.

The SIL initiative will support up to 1200 students per year (10 sections/semester of up to 60 students). Enrollment in a 3 credit hour course taught by the Coordinator and a stipend (see budget) will be incentives to serve in this leadership role. The SIL course will also allow proper training.

Evaluation procedure: Immediately after each semester, we will collect and compare data concerning the DFW rates for 2010 sections with U-SILs and 2010 sections without U-SILs with the prediction and goal being that sections with SILs will have significantly lower DFW rates.

3. Sophomore Connections Course. The Coordinator will teach a section of Phil 2010 dedicated to sophomores considering a philosophy major. With enrollment limited to 30, this course will include increased mentoring about the discipline and academic life, events outside of class tied to the course content (e.g., university lectures, Cinefest movies, fine arts performances), and a meal at the professor’s home. We expect this course to improve retention in the same ways Freshman Learning Communities do. Moreover, since many of these students will become majors and will have highly focused attention from the professor, we expect this initiative to help us develop a community of philosophy majors active in the Department and mission of the University. It will also create a group of likely candidates to become U-SILs. This course will be offered in the Spring so that we have time to identify and recruit students.

Evaluation procedure: At the end of each semester this special section of 2010 is offered, we will conduct a survey of the students in it and five other sections of 2010, chosen at random, to determine whether the initiative was successful in encouraging students to become philosophy majors, in developing community, and in increasing student involvement in the University.

BudgetTotal: \$48,500

RPG Coordinator: \$6000/year

\$3000 per year to fund a GTA to cover one course per year to allow the RPG Coordinator to teach the PM course. \$3000 per year summer service stipend for the RPG Coordinator to be awarded in summer 2008 (FY 09).

G-SILs: \$20,000/year

5 G-SILs per year @ \$4,000 each.

These are graduate students who will be paid for the Fall and Spring Semester of the 2007-2008 academic year.

U-SILs: \$20,000/year

10 U-SILs per semester @ \$1000 each. *NOTE: SILs actually paid \$1500 per semester; additional \$500 per student paid by the Office of Undergraduate Studies.*

These are undergraduate students who will be paid for the Fall and Spring Semester of the 2007-2008 academic year.

Sophomore Connections : \$1000/year

\$1000 for reimbursable student activity expenses.

These expenses will be incurred by the professor of the class in Spring 2008.

“Meet & Greet” Sessions: \$1,500/year

\$1500 to host several gatherings in the Fall and Spring of the 2007-2008 academic year in which G-SILs and U-SILs can informally meet the students they will serve, to encourage community and the use of SILs.

Improving Student Learning and Student Retention at the Undergraduate Level

A Multi-Tiered RPG Initiative for Philosophy in the Core: Encouraging Students and Developing Community

Interim Progress-Towards-Goals Report

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2/19/07

Introduction

The approval of our proposal allowed us institute 3 programs and to create an RPG Coordinator to supervise them. The three programs are: (A) Supplemental Instructors for Phil 1010, which for the previous four semesters averaged 26% DFWs;¹ (B) Peer Mentors for Phil 2010, which for the previous four semesters averaged 24% DFWs;² and (C) a Sophomore Connections section of 2010. All programs were begun as scheduled and continue to improve and remain on schedule.

A. Data: Supplemental Instructors for Phil 1010, Fall 2006

1. DFW rates

- | | |
|---|--------|
| a. sections without Supplemental Instructors: | 27.2% |
| b. sections with Supplemental Instructors: | 27.13% |

2. Average grades of all students

- | | |
|---|--------|
| a. sections without Supplemental Instructors: | 2.553 |
| b. sections with Supplemental Instructors: | 2.4625 |

3. Average grades of students who scored less than 65 on the first exam

- | | |
|---|------|
| a. sections without Supplemental Instructors: | 2.24 |
| b. sections with Supplemental Instructors: | 2.08 |

4. Student Surveys: Students did seem to appreciate the effort made on their behalf by this program. Among other questions, the students answered the following (each followed with the average response, from a scale of 1-5):

- Did your Supplemental Instructor stimulate your thinking and/or give you new insights into the subject? 4.15
- Do you think the Supplemental Instructor helped you improve your learning? 4.19.
- Do you think the Supplemental Instructor helped you improve your performance in the class? 3.93
- Are you glad your class had a Supplemental Instructor? 4.06

¹ As per E.1 below, these grad students are now called "Critical Thinking Tutors."

² As per E.1 below, these undergraduate students are now called "Supplemental Instruction Leaders."

B. Data: Peer Mentors for Phil 2010, Fall 2006

1. DFW rates

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| a. sections without Peer Mentors: | 25% |
| b. sections with Peer Mentors: | 24.01% |

2. Average grades of all students

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| a. sections without Peer Mentors: | 2.5275 |
| b. sections with Peer Mentors: | 2.6125 |

3. Student Surveys: Students did seem to appreciate the effort made on their behalf by this program. Among other questions, the students answered the following (each followed with the average response, from a scale of 1-5):

- a. Did your Peer Mentor stimulate your thinking and/or give you new insights into the subject? 3.84
- b. Do you think the Peer Mentor helped you improve your learning? 3.82
- c. Do you think the Peer Mentor helped you improve your performance in the class? 3.84
- d. Are you glad your class had a Peer Mentor? 3.5

C. Sophomore Connections Course

The Coordinator is currently teaching this course for the first time. The course was capped at 30. With 5 Honors students and 15 students who did very well in 1010, the class is off to an excellent beginning.

D. Analysis

Unfortunately, the current data indicate that the interventions allowed for by the Peer Mentoring and Supplemental Instruction programs have very little effect. The Department believes, though, that the current data should not be taken to be definitive as the program was started very rapidly and we had to contend with normal but unforeseen start-up issues. Given those issues, we have already instituted many changes as indicated below (and in one case, already have clear indication of success). We will review the data from Spring 2007 with great care to see if the interventions should be continued in their present form, modified further, or ended.

No hard data is available yet regarding the Sophomore Connections class.

E. Changes

1. For Supplemental Instructors-cum-Critical Thinking Tutors for Phil 1010.

(a) Given the merger of our Peer Mentor program into the Supplemental Instruction program of the Office of Undergraduate Studies (see E.2.a below), we now call these graduate students “Critical Thinking Tutors” to distinguish them from what we now call “Supplemental Instruction Leaders.”

(b) In the Fall 2006 semester, we had each Supplemental Instructor working with two different sections of 1010 taught by two different GTAs. For the Spring, we decided to have each one work with two 1010 classes taught by the same GTA. It is our hope that this will diminish confusion, improve the performance of the Critical Thinking Tutors (as they need only know how one GTA works), and improve the overall results.

(c) We also decided to allow each Critical Thinking Tutor to run their own Pizza Meet and Greet rather than have these events centrally coordinated. Our hope is that this will improve how the Critical Thinking Tutors are viewed by the students.

2. Peer Mentors-cum-Supplemental Instruction Leaders for Phil 2010.

(a) For the Spring 2007, we merged our program with the Supplemental Instruction program coordinated by the Office of Undergraduate Studies. Given that merger, we now call these undergraduate students “Supplemental Instruction Leaders.”

(b) In the Fall 2006 semester, the only training the Peer Mentors received was from the Coordinator. Given the merger, they now receive significantly more training—from Peggy Ogden in the Office of Undergraduate Studies. Though we know this can cause some confusion in that the Supplemental Instruction Leaders must answer both to the Coordinator and to Peggy Ogden, we are convinced that the training from the latter will be worth it. Indeed, as indicated in (f) below, we already have evidence to that effect.

(c) Given the merger, these students now receive an increased stipend (\$500 each from the Office of Undergraduate Studies in addition to the \$1000 they receive from the Department from this grant).

(d) Given the merger, the Supplemental Instruction Leaders now have much of their time with students in sessions immediately preceding or following the class, and in the same room or one nearby. Our hope is this will increase the usage of the Supplemental Instruction Leaders.

(e) We also decided to allow each Supplemental Instruction Leader to run their own Pizza Meet and Greet rather than have these events centrally coordinated. Our hope is that this will improve how the Supplemental Instruction Leaders are viewed by the students.

(f) Although it is still early in the semester, we have some evidence that the changes we have instituted this semester have been to good effect. In one 2010 class with an SIL, we see the following dramatic difference in quiz grades between students that participate in SI and those that do not.

QUIZ AVERAGES FOR SI PARTICIPANTS AND NON-PARTICIPANTS ³					
	QUIZ 1	QUIZ 2	QUIZ 3	QUIZ 4	TOTAL
<i>Non-Participants</i>	6.64	7	4.4	6.6	6.13
<i>Participants</i>	6.94	7.22	6.35	7.9	7.1

³ In both data sets, only students who took at least 3 of the quizzes were included. “Participants” are defined as those who have attended at least 2 SI sessions.