

**Improving Student Learning and Student Retention at the Undergraduate Level  
Application Cover Sheet**

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

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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 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 26% DFWs and Phil 2010 has averaged 24% DFWs. This rate of Ds, Fs, and Ws hinders the retention, progress, and graduation of students at Georgia State. We propose the following multi-initiative 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 and the University.

1. An RPG Coordinator. To supervise the initiatives below, we will immediately create 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), and the Coordinator of Graduate Teaching (CGT), to ensure that the proposed initiatives are properly carried out. The Coordinator will also teach a class for Undergraduate Peer Mentors, as described below. In addition, if the Counseling Center’s Pilot RPG Initiative (a proposal completely distinct from, but consistent with this one) is approved, the RPG Coordinator will serve as a liaison to the Student Success Coordinator (SSC) in that office, working with all Phil 1010 and 2010 instructors during the first 3-5 weeks of the semester to provide the SSC with the names, contact information, and observed risk behavior of any students who are at risk (missed classes or homework, bad grades on quizzes, etc.). The SSC or a trained graduate student coach will then contact the student, assess his or her situation and needs, and provide support services (referral for tutoring, stress or time management, study skills, personal counseling, etc.). Finally, the Coordinator will prepare and submit interim and final RPG reports as required.

2. Supplemental Instruction for Phil 1010. The CGT currently trains philosophy MA students to teach Phil 1010. This program has been tremendously successful and will be expanded to improve retention. Beginning Fall 06, 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 Supplemental Instructors (SIs) for 2 sections of Phil 1010. They will also participate in the University training required to be SIs. (This last point assumes there will be a collective SI training for SIs from across the University). The philosophy SIs will:

- attend one class each week of each of the sections he or she serves.
- be available for supplemental office hours open to all students in their assigned sections.
- offer detailed comments on rough drafts of papers for students in their assigned sections—by thus improving students’ writing and reasoning skills, we will improve their chances of successful progress at Georgia State.
- provide *mandatory* tutoring session(s) for all students in their assigned sections who score below 75 on their first test (sessions to be scheduled in accord with student needs).
- participate in “meet and greet” pizza sessions to introduce themselves and encourage students to utilize their services.

The SI initiative will support up to 700 students per year (10 sections/semester of up to 35 students). It will begin immediately with the first SIs being assigned to Fall 06 classes. SIs will be trained beginning in the week before classes and continuing in the Fall as they work. Using the effective SI programs in the Biology and History as models, 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 SIs and 1010 sections without SIs with the prediction and goal being that sections with SIs will have significantly lower DFW rates. We will also compare the final 1010 grades of those students who scored below 75 on their first test and received SI assistance to the grades of those students (in the non-SI sections) who scored below 75 on their first test and did not receive SI assistance. Finally, we will survey the students to get their impressions of the SI program and their suggestions for improvement.

3. Undergraduate Peer Mentoring for Phil 2010. 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 Peer Mentors (PMs) for students in that course. Each PM will attend all class meetings of one section of 2010 (3 hours/week) and hold 2 office hours/week. PMs will also take a class with the RPG Coordinator where they will be trained to:

- 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” pizza 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 PMs 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).

The PM 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 PM course will also allow proper training. We expect that PMs will learn *to do* philosophy better as they participate in teaching it and that the experience will be intrinsically rewarding. Furthermore, this initiative will develop a core of philosophy majors active in the Department and mission of the University. This initiative will develop a sense of community not only between the PMs and the students they serve but also among the PMs themselves and between the PMs and the faculty. The peer mentoring initiative would begin immediately, with juniors and seniors identified for participation this summer and trained in the PM course while they begin their duties.

Evaluation procedure: Immediately after each semester, we will collect and compare data concerning the DFW rates for 2010 sections with PMs and 2010 sections without PMs. We will also survey the students to get their impressions of the PM program and their suggestions for improvement.

4. 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, attendance at outside-of-class events 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 peer mentors. This course will be offered in Spring 2007 so that we have time to identify and recruit students (primarily from Phil 1010).

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.

**Budget**1. An RPG Coordinator (initiative 1)

\$3000 per year to fund a GTA to cover one course per year to allow the RPG Coordinator to teach the PM course. \$2000 per year summer service stipend for the RPG Coordinator.

\$5000/year

2. Supplemental Instruction for Phil 1010 (initiative 2)

5 SIs per semester @ \$2,000 each.

\$20,000/year

3. Undergraduate Peer Mentoring for Phil 2010 (initiative 3)

10 PMs per semester @ \$1000 each.

\$20,000/year

4. Sophomore connections plan (initiative 4)

\$1000 for reimbursable student activity expenses.

\$1000/year

5. “Meet & greet” pizza sessions (supplement for initiatives 2 and 3)

\$1500 to host several gatherings in which SIs (initiative 2) and PMs (initiative 3) can informally meet the students they will serve, to encourage community and the use of SIs and PMs.

\$1,500/year

**Total:** \$47,500