

**2008 – 2010 CATL Scholar Application**  
**Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning**

**Application due: October 1, 2007 (5 p.m.)**

Please submit an electronic copy of the project description to [pfelten@elon.edu](mailto:pfelten@elon.edu)

**Project Description**

Please submit an electronic copy (in Word or as a PDF) of your project description. The description should be concise, clear, well-organized, and about 3-5 pages in length, double-spaced.

Because the review committee will read applications “blind,” please do not put your name anywhere in the text of your project description. You may include other specific details in the description, such as your department and course titles. If you have questions about how to “blind” your project description (for example, if you need to cite an article which you authored), please contact Peter Felten.

While the CATL Scholar review committee recognizes that each proposal will be different, we ask that you please address the following six areas in your application:

My overall goal for this project is to work with undergraduate research students together to:

1) arrive at a clear, precise, deep and useful understanding of what philosophical evidence-mindedness is and the developmental stages to achieving it, 2) apply this understanding to the way I teach and thus how students learn in my classes, and 3) make our research public so others can benefit from the insights that we glean from this work both within philosophy and across disciplines.<sup>1</sup> Philosophical evidence-mindedness is a foundational aspect of philosophical thinking and expertise and understanding philosophical expertise (and its constitutive elements) will lead to important improvements in the teaching of philosophy and other disciplines.

I will begin by describing the current gap in the scholarship of teaching and learning on philosophical thinking, will describe philosophical evidence-mindedness and show its foundational role within philosophical expertise, will show the impact of this project both for me and for the profession as a whole, and then will describe the method that I will use to uncover the particular nature of philosophical evidence-mindedness and the stages in its development, including a schedule and a budget to show how this project will meet its goals.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

## 1. The Gap in Our Understanding

Philosophy is largely in the dark about its own expertise. Furthermore, what is written in the scholarship of teaching and learning in philosophy is overwhelmingly shallow, lacking a deep understanding of “what is,” focusing almost exclusively on “what works.”<sup>2</sup> As Michael Goldman, the editor of the most prominent journal of philosophy pedagogy in this country, *Teaching Philosophy*, wrote in a positive 2005 review of a collection on teaching: “These essays confirm what has become evident to me in my ten years as editor of [*Teaching Philosophy*]: that the scholarship of pedagogy, at least in philosophy, but I suspect in all ‘content’ disciplines, is rather primitive. Virtually all the essays purport to offer techniques for improving teaching and/or learning but little is said either about what improvements consists in or how one measures it.”<sup>3</sup> Without a clear sense of “what is,” one is at a loss to accurately describe “what works” because one lacks an understanding of the base upon which improvement could be measured.<sup>4</sup> Thus, learning where students are, that is, answering the “what is” question, is necessary to understanding what works and how to assess and teach for transformation.

## 2. What Philosophical evidence-mindedness is, why it matters and why it is hard to teach

Building on my previous work examining the teaching of philosophical evidence-mindedness,<sup>5</sup> at this point in my research on the subject I understand evidence-mindedness (in general) to have three

---

<sup>2</sup> The “what is” and “what works” distinction was introduced by Pat Hutchings; see her “Approaching the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,” available at <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/publications/sub.asp?key=452&subkey=619> (retrieved Sept. 22, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Goldman, “Review of *Teaching Philosophy: Theoretical Reflections and Practical Suggestions*,” in *Teaching Philosophy*, 28:3, September 2005, p. 278. I take it, one of the key reasons that no one is measuring how effective their improvements are is because one cannot test how well one’s technique has improved students’ learning if one do not know where they begin or where, precisely, the goal lies.

<sup>4</sup> I take it that one of the key reasons that no one is measuring how effective their improvements are, as Goldman points out, is that one cannot test how well ones techniques have improved students’ learning if one do not know where they began.

<sup>5</sup> On the pedagogical strategies to foster evidence-mindedness, I have presented: “Structuring Student Note-Taking,” 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Innovation in Instruction Conference, Elon University, Elon, NC, August 2007; “On Student Note-Taking,” 4<sup>th</sup> international meeting, International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Sydney, AU, July 2007; “On Student Note-Taking in *Introduction to Philosophy: How Can We Teach Students to Get the Most Out of this Underutilized Skill?*” 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Teaching Philosophy, Association of American Philosophy Teachers, Washington, PA, August, 2006; and “Teaching and Learning in the Philosophy Classroom: Two Case Studies on Reading/Writing as

interrelated aspects.<sup>6</sup> 1) Evidence-mindedness requires an active attention to evidence. This requires moving beyond the fact-mindedness at the heart of the “banking model” that Paulo Freire identifies to a place where a person pays attention to *why* she or others hold a particular view, and it requires an active engagement in seeking evidence when analyzing texts, the self, and the world. 2) Evidence-mindedness is a valuing, specifically, an evidence-minded person values reasoned explanations for why she should believe a certain claim. 3) Evidence-mindedness is a way of seeing the world, as one in which evidence and reasons matter—that is, as one in which neither dogmatism *nor* relativism rule the day and thus as one in which there *are* higher values, but in which these higher values are a process for deciding rather than any specific set of claims or conclusions that one would arrive at through the process. Finally, evidence-mindedness, as described here, is not merely an academic skill: it has real implications for how a person lives. Specifically, if a person determines her choices by what is most reasonable and one learns what is most reasonable by determining what has the strongest evidence, then evidence-mindedness will inform how a person acts and teaching evidence-mindedness will improve students’ decision-making skills.

It is important to note that philosophical evidence-mindedness is in important ways quite different from other forms of evidence-mindedness. What philosophers are doing when they are doing their work is to analyze and interpret arguments and this means analyzing and interpreting what counts as evidence, the strength of the evidence, and what conclusion, specifically, evidence supports (or does not support). This focus on argumentation is not unique, in itself, but what counts as evidence in philosophy and how philosophers go about making and evaluating arguments is. A scientist relies on certain types of evidence, a historian other types, and a philosopher other types still. For example, a thought experiment — in which the person doing the experiment does nothing but think about the world — counts highly as evidence for philosophy. In fact, many of the most important texts in

---

Philosophers,” with David Concepcion and Paul Rainiri, Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Colloquium on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Madison, WI, April, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> I suspect that they may, at times, be seen and analyzed separately, but the number and relation of these aspects of evidence-mindedness is not important, at this point in my research.

philosophy are or are based on thought experiments.<sup>7</sup> Paying attention to evidence and seeing argumentation as what matters, learning how to evaluate evidence effectively is invaluable to doing philosophy and learning how to teach these skills, values and worldviews is critical to teaching philosophy effectively. Furthermore, even though I have been examining philosophical evidence mindedness for some time, I continue to find it a particular challenge to explain what, precisely, counts as philosophical evidence to my students and how to weigh that evidence. I can perform this evaluation and weighing of evidence, but cannot thoroughly and transparently explain what I am doing when I am doing these tasks. Yet, being able to do so is necessary for teaching in the most intentional and effective way possible.

Therefore, this project will change my classes in important ways. I will be looking at something largely unexamined and doing so through techniques, which I will describe below, unused— as far as I know—in exploring philosophical expertise. Thus, by gaining this insight into philosophical ethical mindedness, exploring how this has changed my classes, and making this information public, I will be doing work that is transformative for philosophical pedagogy. This study will therefore be important for teaching philosophy wherever this occurs. Finally, because what I will be learning will shed light on evidence-mindedness in general, this study will have important implications for teaching across the disciplines.

### 3. Method for the Study of Philosophical Evidence-mindedness

My primary method for exploring evidence-mindedness and its development is through think alouds. As philosophers, just as we are able to evaluate argument well, we are quite likely to know how well others evaluate arguments (or do not); what we lack is a sufficient understanding of *why*. Think alouds are designed to allow us to have (some) access to just that; like “showing your work” in math, think alouds are a way to make some of the thinking that is invisible in normal circumstances

---

<sup>7</sup> This is true both of one of the most important parts of Plato’s *Republic* and a thought experiment is the very heart of Descartes’s *Meditations*.

visible. Specifically, in a think aloud, a person is video or audio taped and asked to read or solve a problem or recount information and to do so while saying out loud everything that is going on in her “mind” while she does so.

Having learned about think alouds from some of the most important scholars in the teaching and learning today, I began experimenting with the use of think alouds this semester and have been video and audio taping students doing them; I have already found them quite instructive.<sup>8</sup> I have also found them outstandingly time-consuming: for example, in the first set of think alouds I did (which only involved a class of 20 students), the think alouds took more than 40 hours to prepare for and to record.

For this project, I will have students in my Ethical Practices classes perform think alouds each. Furthermore, to fully understand how philosophical evidence-mindedness is developed, I will tape think alouds from students in other Ethical Practices classes, students who have not taken any philosophy classes, students who are further along the road to philosophical expertise (e.g., senior majors with significant philosophy experience), students who are along the road to expertise in other areas (senior majors with no significant experience in philosophy) and faculty members both within philosophy and outside of philosophy.

#### 4. Schedule and Budget:

I am planning on either leading or overseeing roughly 400 hours of tapings of think alouds, all of which will need to be prepared for and then analyzed, synthesized, and then the insights will need to be applied to the classes I teach. I will also be doing this project with students as undergraduate research partners. Without any question, therefore, the single most important need I have in

---

<sup>8</sup> Sam Wineburg and K. Anders Ericson, among many others, have used think alouds extensively, have written about their use, and have offered important work that has come out of their work with think alouds; for examples, see Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) and K. Anders Ericsson & Herbert A. Simon, H. "Verbal reports as data," *Psychological Review* 87 (3) (May 1980): 215–251.

undertaking this study is for time: time to administer think alouds, to train students to administer think alouds, to analyze with students the copious amounts of information we will be collecting, to apply our insights to the classes I teach, and for us to write about what we have learned through the think alouds and through the application of the insights gained through them for my classes.

Before the beginning of this project, I will be attending the American Association of Philosophy Teachers bi-annual meeting and collecting and analyzing the think alouds of some 40 or so professional philosophers and some 5 or so graduate students. This will give me a strong basis upon which to succeed in this study.

Fall semester, 2009:

I will work with undergraduate research students to record think alouds for everyone my Ethical Practices class three times throughout the semester. We will also record think alouds from the Philosophy Senior Seminar students (roughly 8 or 10) and from the same number of senior majors that are not philosophy majors (who have not taken a large number of philosophy classes). We will begin the process of analyzing this information.

Spring Semester, 2010:

Again, we will record think alouds for everyone in my Ethical Practices class three times throughout the semester. We will also record think alouds for 20 faculty members who are not philosophers and we will continue analyzing the information. I will also travel to a conference or make a campus visit to speak with others who are doing work with think alouds—possibly Sherry Linkon or David Pace, to exchange ideas.

Summer, 2010:

I will work with a student or two on a SURE project analyzing the information that we will have recorded in the think alouds. We will re-design the Ethical Practices class based on the insight we have gained and will also revise the think alouds to gain new information as we move forward.

Fall, 2010:

To test if the course changes were effective, we will record think alouds for everyone in my Ethical Practices class three times throughout the semester. We will also record think alouds from the Philosophy Senior Seminar students (roughly 8 or 10) and 20 non-philosophy faculty members (some at Elon, some at other schools in the area).

Winter, 2011:

We will analyze the effectiveness of the revised course and will make further changes and refinements to the new ethical practices course.

Spring, 2011:

Again, to test if the course changes were effective, we will record think alouds for everyone in my Ethical Practices class three times throughout the semester. We will continue with the analysis of the information we have, and we will also present our finding—if possible, with some of the undergraduates who have been part of the research project.

Total Budget:

1. administrative help: \$1500

I will hire a research assistant each semester to organize, convert think alouds to DVD's, find research subjects and schedule and set up think alouds): each semester, one student x 50 hours x 7.50/hour = \$1500

2. Research subjects: \$800.

I will pay the non-faculty \$10/hour for their time: 80 person/think alouds at \$10 per think aloud= \$800 dollars

3. Materials: \$400

DVD's (roughly 800 x \$0.45= 360) + misc. materials (\$60) = \$400

4. Travel: \$1300

I will be traveling to one conference the first year to network and talk with others using think alouds to help me use learn how to use them most effectively; I will travel to present our work, with students, in the final year of the project. We will look to gain funding through the Undergraduate Research program to make this feasible.

Total Costs \$4000