

University of Northern Colorado

Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

Department of Philosophy Faculty Publications

Department of Philosophy

Spring 4-9-2021

Are Philosophers Failing First-Generation Students?

Bailie Peterson

University of Northern Colorado, bailie.peterson@unco.edu

David Agboola

University of Northern Colorado, oluwagbenga.agboola@unco.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/philfacpub>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Peterson, Bailie and Agboola, David, "Are Philosophers Failing First-Generation Students?" (2021).

Department of Philosophy Faculty Publications. 6.

<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/philfacpub/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Philosophy at Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of Philosophy Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. For more information, please contact Jane.Monson@unco.edu.

Are Philosophers Failing First-Generation Students?



Bailie Peterson, Philosophy

David Agboola, Applied Statistics & Research Methods

April, 2021

Pilot Study

Introduction and Goals

The experiences of first-gen/low-income students raise questions about whether philosophers have done enough to identify and address potential roadblocks keeping them from the field or to make it welcoming to all.

This project has two goals:

1) to identify and express issues encountered by students from less traditional backgrounds. By bringing these challenges to light, we hope we will be better able to support means to overcome them.

2) To better understand what students believe about philosophy when they begin their first course, in order to see what conclusions we can draw about their concerns and perceptions. This study is influenced by the work of Demarest et al., 2017, on the role of gender and its impact on continuation in philosophy.

Connections and Assumptions

Several assumptions guide this work. First, we feel that less privileged philosophers 1) have valuable contributions to make, and 2) face obstacles that their more privileged peers do not. (see, also, Morton, 2019). In addition, 3) we think that there is sufficient value in the study of philosophy to warrant moves to increase access to the field.

We are concerned that less privileged philosophers have been omitted from conversations about whether or not philosophy is welcoming, and what can be done to resolve issues. If philosophers are making assumptions about the lack of diversity in the field based only on the impressions of those from more privileged backgrounds, we fail to respect all voices. We also miss out on opportunities to inform our teaching and practice and ultimately, to improve the field.

We think that a deeper understanding of the perceptions that enter the classroom with less traditional students can help motivate and guide efforts for improvement. Combining data about students' perceptions of philosophy with discussion of methods to improve the field (e.g. Peterson, 2021) will create opportunities to better understand and address equity issues.

Resources

Demarest, Heather ; Seth, Robertson ; Megan, Haggard ; Madeline, Martin-Seaver & Jewelle, Bickel (2017). Similarity and enjoyment: Predicting continuation for women in philosophy. *Analysis* 77 (3):525-541.

Morton, Jennifer, 2019. *Moving Up Without Losing Your Way: The Ethical Costs of Upward Mobility*. Princeton University Press.

Peterson, Bailie 2021. "Supporting First Generation Philosophers at Every Level." *Forthcoming in The APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*.

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Survey Scales by Gender

Scales ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Scores closer to 3 indicate no clear perception. Higher scores indicate positive perception.

Scale	Overall (n = 297)		Male (n = 107)		Female (n = 190)		Two-Sample t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Similarity with Philosophers	3.04	.52	3.07	.44	3.03	.56	.63	.528
Enjoys Philosophy	3.00	.76	3.05	.83	2.98	.71	.84	.397
Presence of Gender Bias	2.98	.75	3.07	.68	2.93	.79	1.50	.133
Difficulty in Philosophy	3.14	.78	3.24	.82	3.09	.76	1.61	.109

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Survey Scales by First-Generation Status

Scale	Overall (n=297)		First Generation (n = 114)		Non-First Generation (n = 186)		Two-Sample t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Similarity with Philosophers	3.04	.52	3.01	.56	3.07	.50	-.87	.388
Enjoys Philosophy	3.00	.76	2.93	.79	3.06	.74	-1.52	.129
Presence of Gender Bias	2.98	.75	2.96	.73	2.99	.78	-.336	.737
Difficulty in Philosophy	3.14	.78	3.08	.78	3.19	.78	-1.20	.232

Our results indicate that most participants showed only a minimal perception that they are similar to philosophers, as indicated by an average of 3.04. We also observed that they perceived philosophy to be a slightly difficult course ($M = 3.14$). But they do not have a clear perception about being able to enjoy philosophy and the possibility that philosophy tends to be express a gender bias in favor of men. Not having a clear perception of philosophy could be explained by their minimal exposure to the world of philosophy. It makes sense not to expect them to have a clear perception or opinion about philosophy coming into the introductory level classes. The low standard deviation observed for each of the four scales suggests that most participants share the views explained above. The results are similar concerning first-generation status and do not vary based on this identification. We think that the difference at our institution between first and continuing-generation students is less severe than in some institutions, which may partially explain this result. This study will be expanded in summer and fall 2021 so that we can further support our results and improve our understanding.

(Taber, K.S. The Use of Cronbach's Alpha When Developing and Reporting Research Instruments in Science Education. *Res Sci Educ* 48, 1273–1296 (2018)).

Methodology

Methods vary, reflecting the two goals of the project. Goal 1 included analysis and review of philosophical, educational, and pedagogical research and incorporation of student and faculty experiences. Goal 2 included statistical analysis of the results of an anonymized questionnaire given as part of a pilot study. In the fall of 2019, we surveyed 307 students at the University of Northern Colorado who were in their first philosophy course. Approximately half of these students identify as first-generation students. Roughly one-third are Pell Grant Eligible. UNC is an emerging HSI with a more diverse population than most neighboring universities.

256 participants were required for G*Power rating of 85%. See Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A.-G., & Buchner, A. (2007). G*Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 39, 175-191.

Analysis

The goal of the study was to understand college students' perceptions of philosophy. More specifically, we wanted to know if these perceptions vary by gender and first-generation status. We measured results on four scales. Factor analysis was conducted on the data to check that the four scales were all identified by the survey items. Only the items that represented the scales were kept. We checked that the Cronbach alpha of all items that made up each scale to be at least 0.7 (Taber, 2018). Finally, we conducted an independent-samples t-test to compare the averages of two independent groups (gender and first-generation status) to verify whether there is statistical evidence that their average response to the four scales is different. That is, we want to know if student perception about philosophy varies by gender and first-generation status. It was hypothesized that students do not have strong perceptions about philosophy since most of them were not exposed to the course before the class.

Thus far, our results support the thesis that the population surveyed does not have strong views about gender bias in philosophy, enjoyment of philosophy, similarity to philosophers, or the level of difficulty they would encounter. We are going to continue this analysis in the summer and fall of 2021.

For more information about this work please contact :
Bailie Peterson (Bailie.Peterson@unco.edu)
David Agboola (oluwagbenga.agboola@unco.edu)