

## The Status of Philosophy in the Two-Year College

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The philosophy curriculum in most two-year colleges has been designed primarily for students enrolled in transfer programs (Schmidt, 1973). This practice of drawing enrollments almost exclusively from the transfer population has, until recently, provided philosophy departments with a small but adequate number of students to keep many of their course offerings in the curriculum. However, recent trends in the two-year college, such as increased enrollment in career or vocational programs, elimination of philosophy requirements, attractiveness of newer disciplines in the social sciences, and student demands for "practical" and "relevant" courses, have served to reduce the proportion of the student population from which philosophy departments have traditionally drawn their enrollments. In addition, there are three characteristics of the student population that are changing and could conceivably have a particularly strong influence on the role of philosophy in the two-year college.

The first of these changes concerns the steady increase in the proportion of two-year college students enrolled in occupational programs. The percentage increased from 13 percent in 1965 to approximately 30 percent in 1970 to nearly 50 percent in 1976 (AACJC, 1976).

The second important change that has occurred in recent years has been the increase in the number of students enrolled in non-credit courses or programs in the two-year college. According to a recent American Association of Community and Junior Colleges report (AAJC, 1976), over 1.5 million persons were participating at that time in courses or programs not carrying credit (e.g., civic, cultural, community interest, and recreational courses).

The third major change that has occurred in the two-year college concerns the composition of the student population itself. Over half (56%) of the students in the two-year colleges were enrolled part-time and, as of 1974, over 40% of the two-year college students were over age 21, an increase of 10 percent in the enrollment of this age group since 1970 (AACJC, 1976). Part-time and adult students have been characterized by Cross (1975) as being extremely practical, vocationally inclined, and having little or no interest in taking courses taught as foundation blocks for further study.

In light of these noted trends, it seems important to find out what effects, if any, these changes appear to be having on enrollments in philosophy courses,

and, conversely, what actions, if any, philosophy departments are taking to respond to the changing educational needs and interests of the two-year college students. These concerns could be addressed by obtaining information on such questions as: To what extent are enrollments in philosophy changing proportionately with the total community/junior college enrollments? To what extent are courses in different areas of philosophy (e.g., introduction/history, ethics, logic) offered in the two-year college? To what extent have areas within the philosophy curriculum expanded, remained stable, or declined in terms of their enrollments? And what changes in philosophy course offerings, if any, are related to increased or decreased enrollments in that area? Each of these questions is considered in this study.

### *Method*

Class schedules for Spring 1975 and Spring 1977 were obtained from a representative national sample of 178 two-year colleges participating in a nationwide study of the humanities curriculum in community and junior colleges. The study was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges.

For each college in the sample, a list of all humanities courses appearing in the Spring 1975 and Spring 1977 class schedules was sent to a campus representative who was then asked to provide enrollment figures for each of the designated courses offered. Enrollment data were obtained from the 178 colleges, which comprise 15 percent of all colleges listed in the *1976 Community, Junior, and Technical College Directory*.

Philosophy courses and the number of students enrolled in them were first counted for each college and then grouped into one of five categories: (1) Introduction/History of Philosophy; (2) Ethics; (3) Logic; (4) Philosophy of Religion; and (5) Special Topics (e.g., Problems in Contemporary Philosophy; Existentialism; Philosophy of Science; Indian Philosophy; Philosophy and Modern Life; Individual and Society). This analysis was performed separately for Spring 1975 and Spring 1977. In addition, the total number of students enrolled in humanities courses was computed for the sample. Included in this sample were courses in either history or appreciation of art, music, and theater, as well as courses in cultural anthropology, literature, foreign languages (including English as a second language), history, political science (including jurisprudence courses concerned with history and/or law), interdisciplinary studies in the humanities, and social/ethnic studies.

### *Results*

A major purpose of the study was to determine whether enrollment in philosophy increased, remained stable, or declined in relation to total humanities and total college enrollments for these two recent time periods. The data presented in Table 1 reveal that between Spring 1975 and Spring 1977 there

was a modest increase in total college enrollments of 7.4 percent, a slight decrease in total humanities enrollment of 3 percent, and a rather substantial decrease in the total philosophy enrollment of 7.7 percent. The data also show that in Spring 1977 only 2.2 percent of all two-year college enrollments were in philosophy courses.

**TABLE 1**  
**Philosophy Enrollments in Relation to Total Humanities**  
**and Total College Enrollments,**  
**Spring 1975 and Spring 1977 (178 Colleges)**

Category	1975	1977	Percent Change
Philosophy Enrollments	19,179	17,702	-7.7
Humanities Enrollments	271,465	263,305	-3.0
College Enrollments	740,883	795,925	+7.4
Philosophy as a Percent of Humanities Enrollments	7.1	6.7	-.4
Philosophy as a Percent of College Enrollments	2.6	2.2	-.4

*Changes in Philosophy Enrollments*

A comparison of enrollments for each of the five philosophy areas was made for Spring 1975 and Spring 1977. This was done to determine whether the overall decrease in philosophy enrollment (7.7%) was indicative of a general enrollment decrease within each of the five categories considered.

**TABLE 2**  
**Change in Philosophy Course Enrollments by**  
**Subcategory from Spring 1975 to Spring 1977**

Philosophy Area	1975	1977	Percent Change
Intro./History	10,436	8,652	-17.1
Ethics	1,944	2,087	+7.4
Logic	3,794	3,690	-2.7
Religion	1,449	1,062	-26.7
Special	1,556	2,211	+42.1
Total	19,179	17,702	-7.7

As shown in Table 2, there was a considerable increase in one philosophy area—Special Topics (+42.1%) and a moderate enrollment increase in a second area—Ethics (+7.4%). However, in the same time period in which enrollments in Special Topics and Ethics increased, enrollments in the remain-

ing areas of the discipline decreased. The decline in enrollments was relatively slight in Logic (-2.7%), substantially greater in Introduction/History of Philosophy (-17.1%), and largest in Philosophy of Religion (-26.7%).

### *Types of Philosophy Courses Offered*

A further objective of this study was to identify the extent to which different areas of philosophy are represented in the two-year college curriculum. The percentage of colleges that offered at least one course in a given philosophy area, along with the percentage of total philosophy enrollments represented by each of the areas for Spring 1975 and Spring 1977, are reported in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
**Distribution of Course Enrollments by Subcategory**

Philosophy Area	Percent of Colleges Offering a Course		Percent of Total Philosophy Enrollments	
	1975	1977	1975	1977
Intro./History	55.6	56.2	54.4	48.9
Ethics	25.3	23.0	10.1	11.8
Logic	25.8	26.4	19.8	20.8
Religion	20.8	18.0	7.6	6.0
Special	15.2	19.1	8.1	12.5
Total	65.7	64.0	100.0	100.0

The data appearing in Table 3 show that for Spring 1977 nearly half (48.9%) of all philosophy enrollments were in Introduction/History courses. Course enrollments in the remaining areas of philosophy considered were, in descending order: Logic (20.8%), Special Topics (12.5%), Ethics (11.8%), and Religion (6%). Perhaps the most surprising finding appearing in Table 3 is the relatively low percentage of two-year colleges that offered at least one philosophy course in Spring 1975 (65.7%) or Spring 1977 (64%). In addition, the percentage of colleges that offered a philosophy course in any of the areas examined is alarmingly low. To illustrate, in Spring 1977, less than 30 percent of the two-year colleges offered a course in Logic (26.4%), Ethics (23%), Special Topics (19.1%), or in Religion (18%).

### *College Size and Course Offerings*

A further purpose was to ascertain if institutional size is related to the range of philosophy courses offered by a two-year college. In order to address this concern, the colleges were divided into three size categories on the basis of their enrollments: (1) small—1-1,499, (2) middle—1,500-7,499, and (3) large—7,500 and over.

**TABLE 4**  
**Percentage of Colleges Offering a Course in a**  
**Philosophy Area by Institutional Size**  
**Spring 1977**

Philosophy Area	Small (1-1499)	Middle (1500-7499)	Large (7500+ )
Intro./History	31.9	63.2	90.9
Ethics	7.2	19.7	65.6
Logic	2.9	25.0	78.8
Religion	1.4	17.1	54.5
Special	5.8	17.1	51.5
Colleges Offering at Least One Philosophy Course	37.7	73.7	97.0

As shown in Table 4, a strong, positive—and expected—relationship existed between institutional size and the percentage of colleges that offered a course in each of the philosophy areas considered. That is, large colleges were much more likely to offer a course in any one philosophy area than were the middle-sized colleges which, in their turn, were more likely to do so than were the small colleges.

For example, a much greater percentage of the large colleges (78.8%) offered a course in Logic than did the middle (25%) or small (2.9%) colleges. This finding indicates that the selection of philosophy courses available to students (or potential students) attending a large college is likely to be much greater than that available to students attending a middle or small college.

### *Discussion*

An important finding in this study was that philosophy enrollments showed a rather substantial decrease during the same time period that two-year college enrollments exhibited a marked increase. This finding suggests that the current trends in student interests towards careerism and more practical and immediately relevant subjects may be having an adverse effect on total philosophy enrollments. However, a closer study of the changes that occurred within the philosophy areas seems to indicate that student demands for practical or immediately relevant subjects can have a positive, as well as a negative, effect on philosophy course enrollments. That is, the two areas of philosophy that registered the greatest enrollment increases—Special Topics (+42.1%) and Ethics (+17.4%)—may have been considered by students as being more in line with their current interests (e.g., Moral Philosophy, Individual in Society) and concerns (e.g., Medical Ethics, Government Ethics) than the two areas of philosophy registering the greatest enrollment decrease—Philosophy of Religion (−26.7%) and Introduction/History of Philosophy (−17.1%). These trends suggest that philosophy departments may be able to increase their

enrollments if they expand their course offerings in areas that are attuned to the needs and interests of all segments of the two-year college population—transfer, occupational, and non-degree oriented students.

Two other important findings with respect to the future of philosophy in the two-year colleges were: (1) approximately 35 percent of the colleges did not offer a philosophy course in Spring 1975 (34.3%) or in Spring 1977 (36%); and (2) the range of philosophy courses available to students in most two-year colleges was rather limited. Several implications can be drawn from these findings concerning the effectiveness of philosophy departments to attract transfer, occupational, and non-degree oriented students to enroll in their courses.

Approximately two million students, representing almost half of the total credit enrollments in two-year colleges, are in transfer programs. The findings that less than 60 percent of the two-year colleges offered a philosophy course in Introduction/History and that each of the other four content areas examined were offered in less than 30 percent of the institutions highlights the need for colleges to increase the range of philosophy courses they offer. Unless such an action is taken, the downward trend in the already small number of transfer program students who take philosophy, either as a general education requirement or as an elective, is likely to continue.

One consequence of this failure to expose a larger number of transfer program students to philosophy is that course enrollments in this discipline are likely to suffer at all levels of postsecondary education. For example, it seems reasonable to assume that students who are exposed to philosophy in the two-year college will be more likely to pursue philosophy in the transfer institution (as either a major field of study or as an elective) than students who did not take a philosophy course in the two-year college, either because it was not offered or because the offering was of limited interest. Therefore, it would be advantageous to all concerned if philosophy instructors in the transfer institutions worked closely with their colleagues in the two-year colleges to promote student as well as administrator interest in this field.

Since philosophy courses are usually not taught in the secondary schools, the initial interest of students in this subject is not likely to be high. Therefore, two-year college instructors should work with high school teachers and counselors to help generate student interest in philosophy.

Nearly half of all credit enrollments in two-year colleges are in occupational programs. While figures on the percentage of these students who enroll in philosophy courses are not available, the percentage would not likely be high. The Association of Philosophy Teachers (1973), Schmidt (1973), and others have recommended that philosophy instructors develop some distinctive courses that would make their subject an attractive elective for occupational students. However, Cohen (1977a) argues that it would be more feasible to introduce philosophy as a unit within an occupational course. He notes that "teachers of auto mechanics will not send their students to a philosophy course but they might appreciate the philosophy instructor's preparing a course module on 'Business Ethics' " (Cohen, 1976, p. 4). Similarly, the health science

faculty are not likely to impose a philosophy requirement on their students but might welcome having a philosophy instructor teach a unit of their course on the "Ethics of Euthanasia."

A large segment of the two-year college student population participates in courses primarily for personal enrichment and/or career development. This category includes the approximately 1.5 million students who enroll in non-credit courses and programs. The relatively small percentage of colleges that offered philosophy courses related to the students' interests (Existentialism and Contemporary Moral Problems) and concerns (philosophical problems related to such issues as death and dying and genetic engineering) indicates that philosophy departments have done little to attract nondegree students to enroll in their courses.

Two ways in which philosophy departments can reach such students are: (1) to offer courses which would focus on their special interests; and (2) to design colloquia, seminars, lectures, and short-term programs which address the current interests and concerns of the community.

In sum, the study revealed that students desiring to take a course in a particular area of philosophy to fulfill a degree requirement, to meet a career need, or to satisfy personal interest would not be able to do so at most two-year colleges. The challenge facing philosophy instructors is to develop distinctive courses which would make philosophical studies an attractive elective for all categories of students—transfer, occupational, and continuing education.

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