



*Surprise! Participants in the 2014 UC San Diego Summer Program for Women in Philosophy took this photo and had copies printed out for the organizers and department. Gabriela Azevedo, who was interviewed for this story, is holding the exclamation point.*

## UC San Diego Philosophers Work to Fix Discipline's Gender Disparities

It's no secret that in philosophy, around the country and abroad, women are underrepresented. But at UC San Diego, faculty and students are actively working to change the numbers for the better.

Rick Grush is tackling the issue both as the philosophy department's director of graduate studies and, together with doctoral student Cami Koepke, through the new UC San Diego Summer Program for Women in Philosophy.

### Applications for EDI Innovation Grants Welcomed

The Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion invites applications to the EDI Innovation Grant program, designed to pilot innovative faculty-driven projects that advance the UC San Diego strategic plan diversity goals. Funds of \$5,000 - \$15,000 may be requested; it is expected that up to 10 projects will be funded each year, based on merit of submitted applications.

This program favors proposals that have the potential to advance systemic changes at UC San Diego by exerting a sustained, powerful influence on fostering an inclusive and equitable climate for faculty, staff and students. Co-sponsorship is required.

In addition to funding professor Rick Grush and his Summer Program for Women in Philosophy, recent EDI Innovation Grant recipients also include:

- **Olga Vásquez, Associate Professor, Communication**

Addressing low representation of Native American students at UC San Diego, Vásquez' program provided a research based, culturally sensitive two-week summer writing course that was the academic anchor of the InterTribal Youth/UC San Diego summer program. The course was offered in partnership with UC San Diego Extension. Taught by Caroline Collins, it will be followed by an additional 10-week online writing course for Native American high school students. Vásquez noted, "Every interaction blended history, learning and future opportunity into a moment of wonder. All achieved up to their capacity. The descendant of a Navajo Code-Talker, the teenage female tribal leader, as well as those whose family experiences were not so positive all took away the gift of learning at UC San Diego."

- **Todd P. Coleman, Associate Professor, Bioengineering 120**

Coleman—together with Michelle Ferrez, director of the IDEA Student Center at UC San Diego Jacobs School of Engineering, and Amr Haj-Omar, a visiting electrical engineering Ph.D. student from Morgan State University—is partnering with San Diego Mesa College to pilot ways to increase the admission of transfer students, including female, underrepresented and first generation students, into undergraduate and graduate engineering at UC San Diego. "The significance of four-year institutions building relationships with community colleges to strengthen transfer agreements is essential in engineering because the curriculum is sequential," said Ferrez. "When community college students know precisely which classes they will need to take before they transfer, it smooths their transition into engineering and increases the likelihood of a timely degree."

Project leaders/investigators eligible for an EDI Innovation Grant include faculty and staff from UC San Diego. Projects must have pending or committed other sources of support (institutional, gift or grant) to apply. There is no deadline to apply. For additional information, visit [diversity.ucsd.edu/sponsorships/grants](https://diversity.ucsd.edu/sponsorships/grants) or contact Glynda Davis, [gdavis@ucsd.edu](mailto:gdavis@ucsd.edu), (858) 534-3840.

The problem is not a small one. Women are underrepresented in philosophy at rates similar to those in math, engineering and some physical sciences. Intro to philosophy courses start out about 50-50, said Grush, a professor in the philosophy department. But the numbers drop quickly from there. Among undergraduate philosophy majors, typically around 30 percent are women. There are even fewer female graduate students, and only about 20 percent end up as faculty, according to the American Philosophical Association's [Committee on the Status of Women](#)

Theories on "why," as covered by [NPR](#) and debated in the [New York Times](#), range from all-male reading lists (that turn female students off) to philosophy's aggressive discussion style to blatant discrimination.

Echoing the sort of reports one sees on the popular "[Being a Woman in Philosophy](#)," blog, Koepke recalls being referred to as "the little girl" at a philosophy meet-up in Boise, Idaho not too long ago—and this after she had already earned a master's degree in divinity from Emory University.

Neither Koepke nor Grush believe that the UC San Diego efforts will, on their own, create universal gender balance in the discipline. "Parity," Grush said, "is, for right now, probably pie in the sky." But that doesn't mean one doesn't try to do something.



*Doctoral student Cami Koepke is studying moral responsibility. She and fellow female graduate students in the UC San Diego Department of Philosophy helped launch the program.*

“It irritates me when things can be done to have a positive impact, but people sit on their thumbs,” Grush said. “Studies show that better things happen when we get more diversity.”

As director of graduate studies and with the full support of the philosophy department, Grush is striving to recruit more women to the doctoral program at UC San Diego. Admissions standards and policy have not changed, of course, Grush said. But there’s a concerted effort to meet with the women who have been admitted and to make clear that they are welcome here. Over the last two years, the philosophy department’s incoming graduate students have been nearly 40 percent women—well above the discipline average of around 25 percent.

The new Summer Program for Women in Philosophy directed by Grush—though explicitly aimed at undergrads—is also helping with UC San Diego’s recruitment of graduate students to the philosophy department, he said.



*Philosophy professor Rick Grush with some of the inaugural participants in the Summer Program for Women in Philosophy. Grush, who completed a joint Ph.D. in philosophy and cognitive science at UC San Diego, is the innovative program’s director.*

“It’s part of the appeal,” Koepke agreed. She served as the summer program’s assistant director, but many of her fellow female doctoral students—including Toni Adleberg, Amy Berg, Claudi Brink and Kathryn Joyce—were actively involved in planning and executing the program, too.

The summer program was held for the first time this summer, funded by an Innovation Grant from UC San

Diego’s Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, as well as by the university’s Graduate Division, the Division of Arts and Humanities, and the department of philosophy.

Modeled after the successful Carleton Summer Mathematics Program for Women Undergraduates, the UC San Diego Summer Program for Women in Philosophy, or SPWP for short, is geared both to providing a rich philosophical learning experience and to helping prepare students for application to graduate school.

SPWP is the only program of its kind for philosophy undergraduates, Grush said. And there were more than 200 applicants. Of these, 18 students (primarily juniors) from around the country came to campus.

The two-week summer session featured two intensive courses as well as a variety of workshops. Participants were provided with housing and meals as well as course materials. They also had their transportation costs covered and received a \$600 stipend. Covering all the costs, Koepke said, ensured the program was available to a broad demographic. Though no one took them up on it, SPWP even made provisions for childcare.



*Taking a break from intensive academic work at the Birch Aquarium.*

Courses were taught, by design, by a senior and a junior faculty member, both of them women: Jenann Ismael from the University of Arizona and Gina Schouten from Illinois State University. Grush said the program was looking to create an all-woman environment and to bring in philosophers who would serve as inspiration and provide the students—both the undergraduate program participants and UC San Diego’s own graduate students—with networking opportunities.

Gabriela Azevedo was one of the program participants. Now a senior and back at Williams College in Massachusetts, Azevedo is applying to master’s fellowships at Oxford and Cambridge while she considers whether to eventually pursue a Ph.D. in philosophy.

She cites the workshop on writing samples taught by Amy Berg as particularly useful to her but is also quick to add that “just being there” was perhaps most helpful.

“The grad students we worked with are phenomenal,” Azevedo said. She also sought out, she said, a number of UC San Diego philosophy faculty who were not formally part of the program, just for philosophical conversation and to learn more about graduate institutions.

One of the things she noticed, and believes others in her cohort noted too, is how unusually open the SPWP discussions were—and how much less combative. Though she’s loath to draw conclusions from that observation, she also made another: At the start of the program, she said, participants (herself included) tended to start their comments deferentially and with qualifications. “Over the course of two weeks, statements became more direct and confident,” she said.

Though mentorship and providing a “kind of social scaffolding” to the students were not explicit features of the program, Grush said, they were also not accidental. Program participants, in addition to taking part in the academic version of boot-camp, also spent a lot of time in social and bonding activities.

Year two of the program, for a new crop of aspiring philosophers, is in the works. Grush and Koepke expect to know in early 2015 if SPWP will be offered again this coming summer.

Meanwhile, all the program participants agreed to be a part of a long-term study that will track their careers from here on out. The women will be surveyed regularly over the next 10 to 15 years—to try and discern the effect of the intervention. Did it work? Did it help?

Whatever happens ultimately, whether they pursue doctoral degrees or not, Grush has this reassurance: Despite popular beliefs to the contrary and frequent family pressure to pursue a more applied or pragmatic course of study, a bachelor's in philosophy is actually not a bad bet. Citing PayScale Inc. data published in the [Wall Street Journal](#), Grush said that by mid-career those with only an undergraduate degree in philosophy are in the top third of salaries, ahead of such fields as microbiology or business administration.

“Philosophy gives you the ability to think—a career-independent skill,” Grush said. “It will help you advance no matter what you do.”

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