

Using Interview Projects in the Teaching of Philosophy

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Overview

- Setting
- Goals
- Methods
- Results
- Lessons Learned
- Exercise
- Questions

Setting



- St. Joseph's College in Patchogue NY
 - Four year undergraduate college
 - Suburban commuter college
- Department of Philosophy
 - No Philosophy Major but a recently registered major in Philosophy and Religious Studies

Courses

Wendy C. Turgeon

- Philosophy and Women course: 18 students, all years
- Aesthetics course: 12 students, all years
- Twice a week daytime classes

Michael L. McClain

- Introduction to Ethics: 26 students, all years
- Once a week evening class

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McClain: Goals for Students

- Better appreciate 'real life' implications of ethical theory
- Gain broader perspective
 - Avoid dogmatism
 - Avoid sense of 'anything goes'
- Enhance ability to articulate ethical principles in conversation and in writing
- Better understand importance of coherence in ethical thought

McClain: Method

- Each student selected a 'thoughtful and ethical' person to interview
- Contracted with the person to conduct three interviews
- Interviewed person using a set of questions developed by the instructor
- Reported results in group discussions, formal presentation, and in paper

McClain: Method

- Big questions
 - How is the world organized and what can we know about it?
 - How should we understand human life?
 - How do you make important decisions?
 - What are your ethical principles?

McClain: Method

- Students reported on interviews in weekly group discussions
 - Relatively thoughtful and respectful sharing of ideas
 - Various levels of sophistication and participation
 - Wide range of views expressed
- Students submitted three written reports
 - Reports due two weeks after interview
 - Final cumulative report, integrating all three interviews
 - Comments on each draft

McClain: Method

- Each student gave formal oral presentation
 - Summarized interviews
 - Most were nervous, resistant
- Grade for project included
 - Progress in writing paper
 - Quality of involvement in class discussions
 - Quality of final paper and presentation
 - Content and style