

Understanding the Policy Relevance of 21st Century Philosophy
NSF Award ID 1353796

STS Program's Assigned Title:

A Study of How Philosophy Research and Practice Can Better Contribute to STEM Research and to Public Policy

STS Program's Abstract Revision:

The goal of this research project is to develop an account of how philosophy research and practice can better contribute to STEM research and to public policy. During the 20th century, philosophy became a rigorous academic discipline, but often at the expense of engagement with non-philosophical audiences. One development that sought to remedy this situation was applied philosophy, which attempts to bring philosophical thinking to bear on real-world problems. It often focuses on issues of science, technology, and society. One example is bioethics, which developed as a new approach to philosophy characterized by direct engagement with non-disciplinary peers including physicians, patients, lawyers, engineers, and scientists as they confront policy problems. More recently, other efforts at policy-relevant philosophy have emerged, including feminism, environmental justice, experimental philosophy, and public philosophy. Such efforts face a common challenge: engaging with non-philosophers while maintaining sufficient interesting for philosophers in general.

This project will develop new insights for applied philosophy by drawing from theoretical accounts and case studies, as well as the history of institutional attempts, to extract lessons for how to better integrate philosophic insights with the demands of policy professionals. It will better organize our understanding of policy-relevant philosophical practice in order to open new research avenues for philosophers both in terms of practical opportunities and theoretical questions. The research will also help both the STEM disciplines and policy makers make better use of philosophic insights. Cultivating a new generation of policy-relevant philosophers has the potential of significantly improving policy and discussion about science and technology across multiple sectors.