MEMORANDUM

Date: Thursday, November 23rd, 2009
To: The Professional Development Committee
From: Jim Taylor
RE: Report on Summer 2009 Professional Development Grant

I apologize for submitting this report past the preferred deadline. Here is the information about my grant activities requested by the committee:

a. Period of the grant: Summer 2009

b. Title of the project: “A Philosophical Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts”

c. Name of the primary grant recipient: Jim Taylor

d. One or two sentences summarizing your activities:

   My 2009 summer grant proposal was to write a document for students in my Philosophical Perspectives courses that would help them better understand and appreciate the role of philosophy in the Christian liberal arts. My 20-page essay, "Christian Liberal Learning" lays the groundwork for this document. I have also added a philosophy of science unit to my Philosophical Perspectives class. In addition, I completed a number of other projects last summer, which I will list below.

e. Description of project activity:

   My paper “Christian Liberal Learning” has a section on "Liberal Learning" and a section on "Christian Liberal Learning." The paper provides a philosophical account of the nature and purpose of liberal learning in general and Christian liberal learning in particular. In addition to providing positive accounts of these types of education, I also distinguish them from other educational approaches. This paper provides general foundation for the kind of specific philosophical
thinking about the Christian liberal arts that we engage in throughout the course. A copy of the paper accompanies this report.

Developing the philosophy of science unit for my Philosophical Perspectives course required me to read about philosophical accounts of the epistemology and ontology of science and about the role of philosophy in the integration of science and theology. Most of the material in these areas of philosophy is relatively new to me. I have never had a philosophy of science unit in PHI 6 before, but I have become increasingly convinced of the importance of including this kind of content in order to help students think philosophically about the role of the natural and behavioral sciences in their Christian liberal arts education.

f. Assessment of if/how the original project objectives were met:

My original project objective was to complete the document I mentioned above in section d. Though I did not accomplish this goal in its entirety, I did lay the groundwork for that document in the paper I describe in section e. I also ended up spending time developing the philosophy of science unit for PHI 6 which will also provide material for the overall document. Moreover, I have developed a list of essay prompts for each of the exams in the course that will serve as the basis for additional sections of the document. I have put these prompts in an appendix at the end of this report.

g. List of specific outcomes/achievements:

1. “Christian Liberal Learning” chapter for Philosophical Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts (see additional file)
2. Philosophy of Science unit for “Philosophical Perspectives” course
3. Essay prompts requiring students to write essays applying philosophical topics to larger issues in the Christian liberal arts (see appendix)
4. Additional summer 2009 accomplishments unrelated to the proposed document
   a. I wrote a 5000-word article for the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy on “The New Atheists” that was accepted for publication.
   b. I wrote a 1500-word book review of Michael Ayers, ed., Rationalism, Platonism, and God for The Philosophical Quarterly that was accepted for publication.
   d. I was asked to serve on the advisory board of HarperCollins C.S. Lewis Bible project, and I submitted fifteen scripture passage/Lewis excerpt pairs to the project managers.
e. I carried on a substantial email correspondence with a theologian whom the journal *Faith & Philosophy* had asked to write a review of my book *Introducing Apologetics*.

f. I began to read Owen Anderson’s book, *The Clarity of God’s Existence* to prepare to write a review of it for *The Heythrop Journal*, since the author asked the book review editor of that journal to ask me to write a review of this book for that journal.

g. I was asked by *Sehnsucht*, a journal that publishes essays about C.S. Lewis’s thought, to write an article on Lewis’s debate with the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe.

h. I agreed to write an article on the models of God employed by the New Atheists for an anthology of essays on models of God.

APPENDIX:

Essay Prompts the Require Philosophical Thinking about the Christian Liberal Arts

*Take-home essay exam #1* (The following two prompts have two parts each; the second part of each requires students to apply the philosophical debate discussed in the first part to a larger issue in or about the Christian liberal arts)

1. **Descartes**

   a. Descartes attempted to refute the skeptic (and so establish cognitivism) by means of an epistemological strategy that combined foundationalism, rationalism, and internalism. *Define these theories, explain Descartes’ anti-skeptical strategy that employs them, and discuss either your reasons for thinking that Descartes succeeded in refuting the skeptic or your reasons for thinking that he did not.*

   b. Descartes attempted to refute the skeptic by means of these philosophical theories in order to provide a philosophical justification for the claim that natural science (physics) can give us knowledge of the natural world. *Critically discuss the assumption that, in the Christian liberal arts curriculum, the discipline of philosophy is foundational to the empirical (natural and social) sciences in this way. If you agree with this assumption, explain why, and if you do not agree with it, explain why you don’t.*

2. **Knowledge of God**

   a. Descartes was an evidentialist (in addition to being a cognitivist, internalist, rationalist, and foundationalist). As such, he claimed that people can know that God exists only if they are justified in believing that God exists and that people can be justified in believing that God exists only if they have based their belief in God on a sound deductive philosophical argument for God’s existence that has premises that are indubitable. *Define these theories, explain how they enter into Descartes’ case for the existence of God, and discuss either your reasons for thinking that evidentialism is true or your reasons for thinking that evidentialism is false.*
b. In his recent (2009) book entitled *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge*, Christian philosopher Dallas Willard states that Christian institutions of higher learning (like Westmont) have a responsibility to provide (at least some of) their students with the knowledge they need to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) by being “teachers of the nations.” But he claims that these institutions are failing to fulfill this obligation because “they do not present the basic points of the Christian faith as constituting a body of Christian knowledge that Christians have and non-Christian institutions do not have” (p. 206). Prof. Willard is assuming, of course, that it is possible for people to know that the central doctrines of the Christian faith (including the claim that God exists) are true. **Critically discuss Willard’s assumption that it is possible to know that God exists (rather than to merely believe that God exists). If you don’t agree with him, explain why. If you do agree with him, explain what you think it is that makes knowledge of God possible.**

*Take-home essay exam #2 (Each of the following six prompts has two parts; the second part of each requires the students to apply the philosophical issue in the first part to another issue that arises in or about their Christian liberal arts education as a whole)*

**Metaphysics**

1. **The Mind-Body Problem.** (a) Explain the debate between substance dualists and physicalists by defining their positions and stating what you consider to be the best argument for each view. (b) Discuss the consequences of each of these two philosophical positions for the distinction between the natural and social sciences in light of the following quotation from Alexander Rosenberg’s *Philosophy of Social Science*, 3rd ed.:

   “If, as Descartes held, the mind is a substance quite different from the rest of nature, operating in accordance with different principles, then we have the beginnings of an explanation of why the human sciences cannot proceed in the way the study of matter does. Metaphysical differences dictate scientific differences. . . . (On the other hand,) naturalism holds that the mind is a natural object, thus explaining the appropriateness of methods drawn from the natural sciences to its study” (pp. 246-247).

2. **The Problem of Free Will and Determinism.** (a) Explain the debate between libertarians (who are incompatibilists) and soft determinists (who are compatibilists) by defining their positions and stating what you consider to be the best argument for each view. (b) Discuss the relevance of this philosophical debate for the theological debate between Calvinists and Arminians about God’s sovereignty, election, predestination, and the nature of saving faith.

3. **The Problem of Personal Identity Across Time.** (a) Explain the debate between adherents of the absolute view of personal identity (such as those who identify persons with immaterial souls) and adherents of the empiricist views of personal identity (that stress either bodily continuity or psychological continuity) by defining their positions and
stating what you consider to be the best argument for each view. (b) Discuss the implications of each of these two philosophical theories for the Christian doctrines of life after death and the resurrection of the body.

**Philosophy of Science**

4. **The Scientific Realism-Antirealism Debate.** (a) Explain the debate between proponents of scientific realism and advocates of rational nonrealism by defining each position and stating what you consider to be the best argument for each view. (b) Discuss the ways in which this philosophical debate informs the task of the integration of Christian theology and the sciences.

5. **Scientism.** (a) Explain the debate between proponents of scientism (strong and weak) and those who reject both of these epistemological stances by defining each position and stating what you consider to be the best argument for each view. (b) Discuss the implications of this philosophical debate for the claim that a *Christian* liberal arts education can enable a person to come to know things that a non-Christian liberal arts education could not.

6. **Philosophy and the Integration of Science and Theology.** (a) Explain the debate between proponents of methodological naturalism and defenders of theistic science by defining each position and stating what you consider to be the best argument for each view. (b) Discuss the implications of this philosophical debate for the integration of science and theology in the context of the debate between creationists and evolutionists.