

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Philosophy inquires into some of the most important questions—what is the nature of human beings? what is required for happiness? It does this in its own way, through carefully making distinctions and formulating arguments. My general aim in teaching is to enable my students to ask incisive questions, evaluate reasons, and express objections through engaging with our course readings. In teaching ancient philosophy, I help students connect the texts of earlier thinkers with the questions we continue to ask today. I challenge students to enter into the intellectual world of the thinkers we consider through closely scrutinizing their texts and reflecting on how their approaches and preconceptions differ from our own. This gives students experience of thinking within an unfamiliar intellectual framework and allows them to better reflect on their own preconceptions. Closely reading texts and entering into the author's mindset are vital to all the courses I teach, even when the authors we discuss are closer to the students in time or outlook.

In the classes I am currently teaching at MSU Denver, I accomplish these objectives by requiring the students to regularly submit reading responses that summarize the key features of the reading and then ask a question. These assignments are designed to help the students concentrate on the central issues of the text and prepare them for participating in discussion. In class, I encourage students to pose objections to the arguments we are discussing and to respond to each other's contributions. In my lower level classes, I regularly divide students into small groups for discussion and assign each group a specific question on the reading. This practice helps students to engage with the key issues and actively learn through explaining. It also gives students who are new to philosophy the opportunity to articulate their thoughts in a lower stakes context. They then share their group's thoughts with the whole class, allowing more students to actively participate in understanding the text. My upper division courses are conducted in a seminar style, treating students as fellow learners.

I have extensive teaching experience, having taught 44 classes in my five and a half years of full time teaching. I have regularly taught my department's two introductory courses, Introduction to Philosophy and Introduction to Ethics. In these courses, I seek to show students the value of thinking carefully about some of the biggest questions we face, in conversation with great philosophers throughout the ages. Encouragingly, several of the students in my introductory classes have become Philosophy majors or minors and gone on to join my upper level courses. I also have a strong record of student evaluations. My mean rating as an instructor has averaged 5 or higher (out of 6) in my last four classes. In my last five upper division classes, my median rating as an instructor was a 6, the maximum score possible on the form. Students of my last upper division class, an Ethical Theories course covering contemporary moral epistemology as well as the ethics of Peter Abelard and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, noted my engagement, expertise, and commitment. Sample comments include: "incredibly clear and helpful, and works hard to clarify and make things accessible for everyone," (Student 4) "The instructor was very helpful, understanding and extremely knowledg-

able on the subject. I found this course to be very well taught!" (Student 5) "Sweetest and most helpful professor I know...Always engaged with his students and allows for students to challenge his perspective, and to me that's the ultimate way of teaching!" (Student 6). I regularly teach History of Ancient Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion. I have also developed and taught several upper level undergraduate courses. These include a seminar on Aristotle and contemporary metaphysics, a seminar on Augustine's life and works, and an upper level course on the connections between metaphysics and mysticism in ancient and medieval Western philosophy (see my Sample Syllabi for more details).

I also value contributing to the whole university through my teaching and am developing my pedagogy with this goal in mind. I have taught regularly in MSU Denver's First Year Success (FYS) program, which pairs first generation college students and others who would benefit from additional assistance into a cohort with extra support services. I am also interested in connections to other disciplines. This spring I am teaching a FYS Introduction to Ethics course that is paired with an Introduction to World History Course. Students will participate in Reacting to the Past (RttP, <https://reacting.barnard.edu/>), a pedagogical approach in which students play a role-playing game that immerses them in a key historical debate relevant to the course. In our activity, which will be shared across our two classes, students play democrats, oligarchs, and Socratics debating how to structure Athenian society after the overthrow of the Thirty. During the game portion of the course, the entire class session is run by the students playing their roles and initiating debates and votes. This approach fosters student participation, encourages collaboration, and builds positive peer pressure. I will be presenting on implementing this pedagogy at a session on teaching at the Central APA in 2018.

Assessment of my students and of the success of my courses is based around my students' development of interpretative and evaluative skills. My feedback aims to help with their development: I praise them when they have clearly stated an objection or given good counterexamples and I question their unsupported assumptions. Even when a student's paper is excellent, I offer further objections or considerations to illustrate the importance of continuing dialogue. I see my students' improvement in these skills, evidenced through their papers, exams, and discussion, as the measure of my teaching success. Seeing whether students learn to formulate objections and raise questions on their own is a good measure of the course's success. In discussion, their ability to keep focused on the argument and their engagement with both the text and one another's comments is crucial.

In my courses, I invite my students to join me in reflecting on some of the most important questions in a careful, methodical, and charitable way. This reflection prepares my students for further consideration of these questions and for examination of their own beliefs. The skills which my students develop—reading texts carefully, discriminating between sound and flawed arguments, making distinctions, and evaluating the reasons for a position—are intrinsically valuable, whatever my students' future endeavors may be.