

## 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 the history of 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 and outlook.

In the classes I teach at MSU Denver, I accomplish these objectives by requiring the students to regularly submit reading responses, summarizing the key features of the reading and posing a question about the reading. These assignments are designed to help the students concentrate on the central issues of the text. In class, I encourage students to pose objections to the arguments we are discussing and to respond to each other's contributions. My upper division courses are conducted in a seminar style. In my lower level classes, I devote several sessions to group discussion and presentations. These presentations help the students to engage with the key issues and give some students who do not regularly speak the opportunity to actively participate. Both the presenters and the listening students are able to carefully examine and discuss some of the crucial claims of the thinkers we are considering.

I have extensive teaching experience, having taught 24 classes in my three 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, in conversation with some of the most important authors in the Western tradition, about some of the biggest questions we face. Encouragingly, a number of the students in my introductory classes have become Philosophy majors or minors and have gone on to join my upper level courses. I regularly teach History of Ancient Philosophy and have also taught Philosophy of Religion. I have also developed my own special topics courses. In fall 2013, I taught an upper level undergraduate course examining Augustine's thought through a close reading of the *Confessions* followed by selections from his polemical works, sermons, *The City of God*, and *On the Trinity*. In spring 2014, I taught an upper level course exploring the implications that different views of ultimate reality have for conceptions of, speech about, and attitudes towards the divine. We considered thinkers from the ancient and medieval Western tradition including Julian of Norwich, Xenophanes, Plotinus, Ibn Si-

na, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Bonaventure, and Teresa of Avila. My sample syllabi provide further information on my course design and approach.

My student reviews of instruction (SRIs) show evidence of increasing excellence in teaching. Eleven of my last twelve courses have given my performance as an instructor a median rating of either 6, excellent, or 5, very good, the two highest values, and a mean rating of between 5 and 6. Further, in five of the eight classes I taught this past year, my median rating as an instructor was 6, the highest possible. I am always on the lookout for ways to improve my courses and my teaching style. I carefully examine my SRIs to find areas of improvement. I have incorporated several helpful suggestions, such as using blackboard panels in a consistent order to make it easier for students to take notes. I also seek advice and feedback on my teaching from departmental colleagues. My teaching portfolio includes peer observations from some tenured members of my department.

Assessment of my students and of the success of my courses is based around the 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. The argumentation of my students in their final papers should show a marked improvement from their first papers, with tighter structure, better examples, and better use of distinctions. They should show an increased ability to effectively marshal reasons for or against a position and an improved skill in relating the author's views to their own. I have seen students go from writing a meandering summary with no distinctive argument or thesis to writing papers which carefully interpret and disambiguate a text and respond to its argument with well chosen and relevant counterexamples. In my courses, I tend to offer more structured topics for the first papers while allowing for student latitude in later papers. 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 refine in my classes, such as reading texts carefully, discriminating between sound and flawed arguments, making distinctions, and evaluating the reasons for a position, are all valuable, whatever my students' future endeavors may be.