

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 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 my lower level classes, 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 help the students concentrate on the central issues of the text and prepare them for participating in discussion. I also 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 forty-six classes in my six years of full-time teaching at a diverse urban campus. 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, a number 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.

I am strongly committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in my teaching. I recently helped develop the language for my department's new diversity requirement for our undergraduate majors and helped to ensure that my department passed it. One of

the main ways I promote inclusive excellence is through developing innovative teaching that engages a broader and more diverse student population.

I have begun using [Reacting to the Past](#), a pedagogical approach in which students play a role-playing game that immerses them in a key historical debate relevant to the course, in my Introduction to Ethics classes. The game I used, *The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C.*, divides students into democrats, oligarchs, and followers of Socrates, along with several unaligned roles. These characters are all debating how to structure Athenian society in the aftermath of the reign of the Thirty. Since every student has a part and every vote matters, it encourages broad and engaged student participation. This fosters collaboration and builds positive peer pressure, as students are counting on others from their faction to do their part. There is also a lot of room for initiative in researching characters and ideas. This exercise aids students in getting outside of their own heads and considering other perspectives by requiring them to defend the positions that fit with their assigned roles. The need to negotiate between different factions and interests rewards interpersonal and social skills that philosophy classrooms do not always encourage. Based on student evaluations and my own impressions, this is a good way to get more students from more backgrounds interested in doing philosophy.

I also contribute to diversity by exposing my students to the full range of views on the topics we discuss, emphasizing the importance of thinking through the underlying issues instead of just identifying with a position. In Philosophy of Religion, I choose readings from Buddhist, Muslim, and agnostic thinkers, as well as the more familiar roster of atheist and Christian thinkers. I also include readings from women philosophers in all my introductory courses. For example, a recent Introduction to Ethics course paired Susan Wolf's work on meaning in life with readings on from Epictetus and Blaise Pascal. I also seek to connect philosophy with our current societal context. After reading the *Crito* and seeing why Socrates refuses to escape because he does not want to wrong the laws of Athens, my Introduction to Philosophy class then considers Martin Luther King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. King's letter addresses similar questions—how should we respond to injustice? When can we go against the laws?—showing how these philosophical issues were crucial to the civil rights movements. This series of readings helps my students see how philosophy can be relevant to the contemporary experience and how its perennial questions about how to justly order society connect up with action.

In addition to regularly teaching History of Ancient Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion, I have developed and taught several upper level undergraduate courses including a seminar on Aristotle and contemporary metaphysics, a seminar on Augustine's life and works, an epistemology course exploring the nature of trust and testi-

mony and their roles in forming our beliefs and practices through historical and contemporary sources, and an upper level course on the connections between metaphysics and mysticism in ancient and medieval philosophy.

I also incorporate philosophy as a way of life into my teaching. This past summer I participated in a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar on Philosophy as a Way of Life, where we considered various philosophical ways of life and strategies for teaching them experientially. In my teaching of ancient philosophy, I am working to give students more opportunities to experience what following a philosophical school is like, from doing geometry to reflecting on which goods they take to be final to auditing their time use. This allows them to better understand and engage with the views and practices of these schools. I am also currently developing a course on Philosophies and Religions as Ways of Life in Ancient Greece and Rome that I will be teaching for my university's Honors Program next semester. It examines how these worldviews were used to structure life and values in the ancient world and involves the students creating exercises that apply the various schools of life to our contemporary context while debating among themselves about their continuing worth. These sorts of exercises help more students to see the relevance and value of philosophy to their lives.

I am now serving as one of the Lead Faculty Advisors for the [Philosophy as a Way of Life Project](#), sponsored by the Mellon Foundation and the University of Notre Dame. This project involves building up a network of schools and scholars committed to connecting philosophy to the way students live and to teaching visions of the good life from a wide variety of cultures. I am helping to organize three annual workshops held at Notre Dame for network participants and am also involved in building up teaching resources for our online portal.

In all my teaching, 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. 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.