

## **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 teaching aim is to enable my students to reflect on their own knowledge and values through asking incisive questions, evaluating reasons, and expressing objections in conversation with our course readings. In teaching ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, I connect the texts of earlier thinkers to the questions we continue to ask today. I challenge students to enter into the intellectual world of the thinkers we consider through close examination of their ideas. 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 perspective are vital to all the courses I teach, even when the authors we discuss are closer to the students in time or outlook.

I have extensive teaching experience, having taught fifty-four classes over eight years of full-time teaching at a diverse urban campus. I regularly teach 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 through some of the biggest questions we face, in conversation with great philosophers throughout the ages. My teaching draws on the experiences my students already have, showing how their existing commitments connect up with philosophical questions and approaches. For example, when studying Aristotle on happiness and ends, my students complete an exercise reflecting on their own desires and goals and the interrelationships between them. This enables them to better understand Aristotle's views on instrumental and final goods and see the relevance of his distinction. When discussing Susan Wolf on the meaning of life, I have my students interview someone whose life they admire to help them think concretely about the role that accomplishments, relationships, and doing what you love play in achieving meaning. To further engage with the texts we consider, I require my lower level 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 the process. 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. My upper division courses are conducted in a seminar style, treating students as fellow learners.

Connecting my students' experiences up with the ideas we study together is part of my broader commitment to teaching philosophy as a way of life. I am currently

-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. We had eighty philosophy professors attend our first workshop this past summer and we will be running two more workshops over the next two summers to continue sharing resources and developing as teachers. In both my introductory and upper level teaching, I use exercises to help students better understand the thinkers we are studying and better reflect on what their own views are. Does writing their own obituary decrease their fear of death or increase it? Does it make them more sympathetic to Epicurean views on death or reaffirm the importance of accomplishing life projects? These sorts of exercises help students to see the relevance and value of philosophy to their lives. I have twice taught an interdisciplinary Honors seminar on *The Ancient Arts of Living: Ways of Life in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy, Religion, and Literature* which examines how various worldviews were used to structure life and values in the ancient Mediterranean. For their final project, students create exercises that apply one of these ancient schools of life to our contemporary context while reflecting on the merits of these ideas. I recently presented to faculty and graduate students at Purdue University on incorporating philosophy as a way of life into teaching. I would enjoy helping graduate students incorporate these ideas and methods into their own formation as philosophy instructors.

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 testimony 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.

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.