

Teaching Statement

In teaching philosophy, I aim to help students develop their ability to think critically and express themselves clearly. In what follows, I describe how I have pursued that goal so far.

One type of lower-level course I have taught is an introduction to probability and decision theory. One of the joys of teaching such a course is in helping students gain confidence in their quantitative reasoning. Moreover, the formal theories covered provide ample opportunity to relate the formalism to everyday reasoning and decision making. When teaching probability theory, for instance, we discuss the base-rate fallacy. And I begin the course with an introductory unit on critical thinking, where I stress that there is more to being a good reasoner than possessing sharp analytical skill, as I believe that developing a fair and open mindset of evaluating views that conflict with one's own is also crucial.

In my upper-year seminars, I center the class discussion and assignments around systematizing and evaluating arguments from primary sources. During class discussion, I help students build the skills of argument analysis by not only talking through my own standard form reconstructions of arguments, which I provide on handouts, but by also guiding them through the process of argument reconstruction. I will, for instance, provide a passage on a handout, and we will work together as a class to write out that argument on the board. After doing reconstructions together, I assign the students to small groups to systematize a passage among themselves, before discussing as a class the various results that the groups came up with. The skills of argument analysis are ultimately evaluated in a series of essays that make up the majority of the course work.

In addition to helping develop the skills of argument analysis, I lead class discussions with the aim of fostering the fair and open mindset that I believe is an important part of critical thinking. I model rational disagreement for my students by putting forth a claim or argument as my own and asking students to argue against it; I then respond to their points in a calm and direct way, to show them what critical but nonpersonal discussion looks like. I also gently encourage students to respond to claims put forward by their classmates. So, for instance, in response to a student putting forth a strong claim, I often respond along the following lines: "The proposal that so-and-so has put onto the table is that such-and-such. Who agrees? Who disagrees?" I ask students who express disagreement to give their reasons.

Both universities I have taught at, Rutgers University and the University of Toronto, are large public institutions with highly diverse student populations, and fortunately this diversity has been reflected in my course enrolments. Here are some ways in which I demonstrate my commitment to inclusivity in my teaching. While running class discussions, I strive to create a warm atmosphere where everyone feels equally welcome to participate, while at the same time taking into consideration that some students might feel hesitant to engage because, for instance, they feel they do not meet the stereotype of what a philosopher is. So I encourage and highlight, in a tactful way, contributions from students who might not feel confident in speaking up. I also attempt to combat that stereotype by assigning readings from, for instance, woman philosophers.

In addition to teaching introductory and advanced undergraduate courses, I had the opportunity during my graduate studies to work for two years as a residence don at a small college in the University of Toronto. My position involved living in residence and managing often very complex student life issues. Most importantly for present purposes, part of my job was working as the philosophy tutor for undergraduates of the college. My tutoring sessions would typically go as follows: a student sends me a paper draft for an upcoming essay assignment, I look over the draft, and we meet for an hour to go over it together. I enjoyed the opportunity to work through the

details of students' work, since it allowed me to effectively lead them through refining and clearly expressing their own ideas. These long, one-on-one meetings with students constituted the most effective and fulfilling of all the teaching I have done. Accordingly, I strive in all my teaching to attend as much as possible to the needs of each individual student. One way that I put this approach into practice is that when a student makes a comment in class discussion—which might seem off-topic or difficult to interpret—I respond by first rephrasing the contribution in a way that highlights what is correct or insightful about it. After charitably paraphrasing their comment, I go on to diagnose the mistake they may be making in a kind and constructive way.