**Teaching Statement**

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In the years that I have been teaching I have learned a lot about how to effectively teach philosophy to many different kinds of students at a variety of institutions. To date, I have taught 35 classes (29 in-person and 6 online) at 7 different institutions. Early on in my collegiate teaching career I taught predominately middle-class Caucasian students at Virginia Tech and Radford University, and I taught predominately first-generation minority college students with part or full-time jobs in the Lone Star College System. Recently, I moved from teaching at UMass, a large public state university, to teaching at High Point University and Wake Forest University in North Carolina, which are both small private liberal arts universities.

In brief, my primary goal in teaching is to demonstrate philosophy’s distinctive ability to cultivate and improve critical thinking skills through clearly formulating and evaluating arguments. Philosophy, and the critical thinking skills it requires, has enriched my life enormously and my goal in teaching is to show my students how it can enrich their lives too. One teaching success that I am particularly proud of involves a first-generation college student who took my Medical Ethics class in the Spring of 2017. Early in the semester, this student approached me after class because she was having trouble understanding the readings and taking suitable notes in class. To help her comprehension, she would come to my office hours each week to discuss the material covered in class. Together we worked on ways for her to better understand the course material and further develop her critical thinking skills.

One thing that was particularly helpful for her and enlightening to me occurred when we compared her lecture notes to mine. She learned that philosophy is about first accurately extracting arguments and then critically evaluating them *even if* one happens to agree with an argument’s conclusion. For example, when considering James Rachels’ argument that killing is no worse than letting die in his “Active and Passive Euthanasia,” she deduced that *if* Rachels was right then there would be no essential moral difference between a government bombing its own citizens and allowing them to starve to death. And she was happily surprised when I informed her that this is nearly the same criticism Philippa Foot makes against Rachels’ argument in her “Killing and Letting Die,” which was the next reading in our class. To her, this demonstrated philosophy’s unique ability to improve critical thinking skills by analyzing arguments. From this experience, I began providing my lecture notes to my students and going over them in class so my students could also better understand how they should be approaching our course materials to better evaluate arguments. This furthered my goal of showing how philosophy can improve critical thinking skills and consequently enrich one’s life.

Experiences like these were instructive in gaining what I take to be a crucial insight into effective teaching: think about learning from the students’ perspective. This simple idea is something I keep in mind whenever considering new readings to assign, constructing lessons and activities, and conducting class. For example, to promote classroom discussions on difficult or controversial topics (without singling out students or their beliefs) I have had students anonymously write down on index cards their thoughts on difficult and sometimes provocative questions (e.g. when, if ever, do you think abortion is permissible? Justify your answer). I then either “shuffle” them around the classroom or have them all passed forward to me to preserve their anonymity. In the former case, I have students read the answers on cards and discuss them amongst themselves, or in the latter case, I will read the answers out and we will discuss them as a class. This practice is helpful in giving a voice to students who are reluctant to participate by discussing and often critiquing what another student thinks in the class without any student being attached to or identified with a particular viewpoint.

Another activity I use to promote productive class discussions is to ask students to break into small groups and create a fictional story or conversation about how one might have come up with a philosophical claim, problem, paradox, etc. that was just explained by me in class. For example, I have asked students to do this with the Ship of Theseus thought experiment, and I have found this activity to bring out the many complicated issues, objections, and questions surrounding identity, change over time, and persistence. Indeed, this activity accomplishes this in a way that is more organic, and student led than my presentation of this material would be in lecture format. For example, one student at Wake Forest University told a story of someone working on restoring an old classic car with new parts and, when trying to sell the car for a profit, encountered some difficulties convincing would-be buyers that the restored car was still “classic.” And to encourage better retention of course material, I have had success in having students re-teach me the arguments from our course readings after I have just taught this material. For example, I will explain divine command theory and have students teach me the Euthyphro dilemma.

To promote more reading comprehension of assigned texts, I often provide reading questions and outlines that guide and help students better understand the assigned readings. For example, when covering Anselm’s ontological argument, my reading questions include: “How does Anselm define ‘God’?”, “Where are the two places God could exist?”, and “Why must God exist in only one of these places?” I also frequently show video clips in class to give students vivid case studies to consider and to show them that philosophical issues pervade their lives. For example, when covering informal fallacies, I have shown clips from the movie *Thank You For Smoking* and had students identify which fallacies are used by the protagonist.

These above pedagogical techniques stimulate students’ interests in philosophical questions by showing them what they can both learn from, and contribute to, philosophy. (See my diversity statement for more information on how my pedagogy is aimed to promote diversity and inclusion). While I believe I have learned many effective pedagogical techniques to demonstrate philosophy’s value since my early days of teaching, teaching philosophy and conveying its value is no easy task and I know there is much more to learn. Skillful teaching is a learned ability that requires persistent effort and commitment, and I am committed to being the best educator that I can be.