

## Teaching Statement

I approach my teaching in terms of the basic aims of liberal education, namely, freeing students from unreflective adherence to received values and equipping them with the skills and dispositions to revise those values when appropriate. I believe that not only does this pursuit yield intrinsically valuable insight into human experience, but also that the skills and dispositions it cultivates are essential to functional democratic society and instrumental in the rapidly changing workplace of the 21st century. For this reason, I design classes that develop skills like creativity, the ability to evaluate information and arguments, and the ability to see problems from and engage in reasoned discussion with diverse perspectives, which empower students to confront the challenges of the present economic and social situation.

In my view, these skills and insights must be earned by students through actively engaging in the practices of the liberal arts. Thus, I design my courses starting from the skills and dispositions integral to Philosophy, then develop a set of activities and assignments that incrementally explain, model, exercise, and finally assess for those skills. For example, I set the ability to engage in productive dialogue with diverse views as a goal for my courses. However, I find that students in introductory courses often lack the skills requisite for effectively listening to their peers, such as pressing their peers for clarification or accurately paraphrasing what peers have said. So, in the first few weeks of these classes I regularly implement an activity explaining and modeling successful philosophical listening. In this activity, students first take a stance on the philosophical question under discussion, e.g., meaning in life. Then, I explain how to actively listen and ask clarifying questions, and I model this with a pair of volunteers. For example, if one student suggests that family is the meaning of life, I work with the other student to develop questions like whether family is a necessary or sufficient condition for meaning, whether this is a personal or universal claim, and what constitutes family. Finally, students take turns practicing this kind of questioning in pairs. By the end of the semester, I find that students experience a newfound capacity to enter into shared philosophical endeavor with their peers, an ability they often find deeply exciting and an impetus for further philosophical study.

Similarly, students earn insights by actively examining and testing ideas for themselves. Thus, my classes require continuous reflection on the students' part. For example, in a recent Modern Philosophy class, I had students write weekly letters to a philosopher in which they develop a question about a thinker's work, and then respond to one of their peers' letters on the part of that philosopher. This exercise requires students to view an insight from different perspectives, to test its limits while also giving it a voice, allowing students to own their relationship to an idea. Part of what my research in Epistemology examines is the way in which humans gain insight by leveraging our perceptual familiarity with the world to exceed what is directly perceptually available to us. For this reason, I encourage students to return to experience – their own, as well as others', by discussion, reading, etc. – in philosophical reflection, creating assignments that require students to use experience as a touchstone for ideas. In my Phenomenology class, for example, one assignment requires students to produce original Phenomenological analyses of an emotion by carefully reflecting on their own and others' experience of that emotion. Students often find such assignments the most rewarding of the class, recognizing Philosophy's ability to deepen their engagement with their own experience.

I believe that diversity and inclusivity are essential to the project of the liberal arts, namely, developing a critical perspective on received values. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I am personally aware that received attitudes and assumptions can make the Philosophy classroom an unwelcoming space for some students. I have worked with students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds over my career, including a large number of first generation and minority students at DUNY (which is a Hispanic Serving Institution). In my experience, both diversity in content and inclusivity in form are necessary to create a classroom in which all students experience themselves as part of an equally shared

endeavor of inquiry.<sup>1</sup> While inclusive pedagogy encompasses a range of practices, I place transparency at the core of these.<sup>2</sup> I communicate the norms and expectations of my class clearly and thoroughly, explain how to meet them, and have students practice attaining these norms. For example, in my introductory level courses, I teach week-long units on how to read philosophy, write philosophical essays, engage in philosophical discussion, and general college study habits. I aim to normalize traditionally marginalized groups and combat stereotype threat by seeking out readings by diverse authors and on topics relevant to students of diverse backgrounds. For example, in my Epistemology course, I pair familiar debates about topics like testimony and Virtue Epistemology with Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice*. I immediately see the difference for some students of color and women students, who were perhaps previously unsure about the value of an Epistemology course, but now find Epistemological ideas as personally relevant.

I have thought carefully about the problem of lagging enrollments in the Humanities. The National Humanities Alliance highlights articulating career pathways, curricular innovation, promoting the discipline, and fostering disciplinary community as key strategies for recruiting students.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, I have undertaken projects in each of these areas, such as increasing Humanities career programming at DUNY (I'm currently in the process of trying to put together a panel discussion with alumni for Spring 2023), redesigning DUNY's Philosophy curriculum to be more interdisciplinary and relevant to students, advertising Philosophy courses and study paths around campus, and advising the Philosophy Club at Trinity. I'm eager to continue exploring similar initiatives.

I believe that Philosophy provides a shared, transformative experience, in which students engage each other and challenging texts to reflect on and rethink who they are, what they believe, and what they value. My teaching is anchored by the strategies required to give every student the opportunity to actively engage in this endeavor.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacquart, Melissa and Rebecca Scott, Kevin Hermberg, and Stephen Bloch-Schulman. "Diversity Is Not Enough: The Importance of Inclusive Pedagogy." *Teaching Philosophy* 42, no. 2 (2019): 107-139.

<sup>2</sup> For the benefits of transparency, see, e.g., Winkelmes, Mary-Ann and Matthew Bernacki, Jeffrey Butler, Michelle Zochowski, Jennifer Golanics and Kahtryn Harriss Weavil. "A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students' Success." *Peer Review* 18, no. 1/2 (2016): 31-6.

<sup>3</sup> Muir, Scott for the NHA. *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities: Leveraging Scholarly Society Resources*. Washington, D.C. (2022). <https://www.studythehumanities.org/strategies>