

Diversity Statement

I see one of my primary tasks as a philosophy instructor as allowing students to see philosophy as *for them*: even if they've never been exposed to philosophy before, even if they find it more difficult than they expected, even if their only associations to philosophy involve old white men with beards.

I was initially insulated from some of these reasons for thinking philosophy was not for me. I was a philosophy major at Simmons College, a small women's college in Boston with four full-time faculty, none of whom were white men. When I wanted to apply to graduate school, I was cautioned that my experiences with philosophy up to that point were far from representative of the profession as a whole. I thought I gave this advice sufficient consideration and decided to apply anyway. I enrolled in the philosophy MA program at Tufts, where the climate was generally excellent. There was gender parity among the graduate students, and the faculty were welcoming, but I noticed that my female colleagues were generally the quietest voices in the classroom. There were a few women on the faculty, formidable presences who I admired a great deal but couldn't imagine emulating. I felt out of place in a way I couldn't identify. Then, after my first year in the program, we hired a junior faculty member who was a woman. She was generous with her time and her feedback, and I found her style of practicing academic philosophy at departmental events, in her research, and in the classroom particularly accessible. Her modeling a style of philosophical inquiry that was rigorous but approachable, neither diffident nor arrogant, contributed to my sense that I should continue on in philosophy.

Being trained at UNC has also given the opportunity to develop as a teacher at a public university where students are consistently smart and motivated but have a wide range of educational backgrounds and life experiences. In the classroom, I am committed to modeling the activity of doing philosophy in a way that is accessible to students from a variety of backgrounds. This includes designing syllabi to include a diverse range of authors, and when teaching ethics courses, papers that

address issues in lived moral experience alongside ethical theory. This commitment also means that I try to create an atmosphere in the classroom where students feel comfortable sharing their own perspectives and competent when respectfully engaging with the perspectives expressed in the assigned reading and with their peers. Sometimes, this means encouraging students to tolerate being uncertain or confused without condemning themselves or others.

I actively encourage students to see philosophy as a skill, something they should not expect themselves to know how to do right away, but that they can learn with practice. Before the first paper in every course, I set aside time at the beginning of several classes for them to ask questions about the assignment. In addition, I create a forum on my course websites where students can converse with each other and with me about the course material, so that students who are shy about speaking in class have another place to contribute to the discussion. I also try to find ways to take away the shame associated with not performing as well as one would like to. For example, when I was a teaching assistant for an introductory Logic course, I had several students who grasped the material quickly and with ease, and several others who struggled the entire semester. My primary aim was to encourage all of them to contribute in our discussion sections, and so I devised a system where we went around the room, and each student had at least try to provide the next step in the proof. If they were unable to do so, I gave them permission to “phone a friend” (in the style of “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?”), in which case the rest of the class could chime in. Because the steps in each proof were of varying difficulty, more or less every student had both given the correct a response and had phoned a friend on at least one occasion by semester’s end. My hope is that these techniques give students the space to feel both welcomed and challenged in the classroom.