Teaching Statement

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My educational goals as an instructor are: (1) to help students to think independently, boldly, and creatively; (2) to accommodate each student's needs, strengths, and learning styles; and (3) to provide each student with the opportunity and comprehensive support to develop a research project based on their learning, one that they can confidently claim as their own.

As an undergraduate, I was a student on the Great Books Program at St. John's College, where all classes are discussion-based seminars. I benefited greatly from the abundance of time and opportunities to participate in conversations about philosophy with my peers and professors. As a result of this, I always strive in my teaching to create a friendly space for students to freely exchange their opinions in class. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when classes were taught online, the biggest challenge I faced as a teacher was finding ways to keep students engaged in the course and responsive to each other. This was my students' first class in philosophy, and many of them were joining from isolated rooms in student dormitories or spaces that they shared with their families. I found three teaching techniques to be particularly effective:

First, students-only discussions: I divided each class into two parts and reserved 10 minutes for peer discussion in between. The first part of each session was mainly expository, so I would provide 3–4 questions based on the texts for students to discuss in breakout rooms in groups of four. Unlike in-person classes, I would only check on their progress near the end of the assigned time. This way, students not only digested the materials better, but also had the space they needed to get to know each other as intellectual partners and even become friends outside of class.

Second, pre-class mini talks: before beginning each class I invited one student to give a five-minute talk about the assigned reading. The requirement was simple: to give one or two reasons why the text was worth reading, even for someone with no prior investment in the subject matter. This allowed students to assume a more proactive role in pre-class learning, become more confident public speakers and, most importantly, train themselves to read positively and constructively.

Third, independent research projects: I encouraged every student to develop an independent research project in alignment with their philosophical interests, so that all of them could finish the course with a high-quality piece of written work that could be used as a writing sample if necessary. My reason for doing this was simple: for the majority of students, this was the first and only philosophy course they would take at Duke, so my aim was that everyone who finished the course could point to something concrete that they had achieved, and take ownership of a semester-long project. To help students identify and research a suitable topic, I implemented two specific policies:

  • **Revise and Resubmit Policy:** I allowed—and in fact often encouraged—students to revise and resubmit their papers as many times as they wished. This policy was primarily

inspired by my past experience as a teaching assistant, when students would often disregard my comments and continue to make the same mistakes in future assignments. How can we motivate someone to read, learn, and act on feedback, especially when most of it is critical? An academic would find this question easy to answer: it is when one hopes that a manuscript has a chance of progressing to the next stage, e.g., being published in a journal, that one is most motivated to accept critical feedback and make constructive use of it. I believe the same reasoning applies to student papers. In my class, since students had unlimited opportunities to revise their work for a better grade, they spent time pondering the feedback they received and thought carefully about how to address it. Additionally, this policy had the added advantage of allowing students to experience philosophy the way most philosophers do: important philosophical ideas often result from a substantial amount of time spent on thinking, revising, and engaging with critical feedback; only very rarely does a philosopher produce a perfect paper on the first attempt.

- **Paired Presentation and Commentary:** To foster a sense of partnership and encourage students to learn better outside the classroom, I put them into pairs and asked each student to prepare a commentary on their partner's presentation. I also asked the whole class to vote for the best session at the end of the semester. I required each speaker to structure her/his talk around four basic components: the motivation for the project; constructing arguments; considering possible objections; and responding to the commentator/audience. Since the audience included the instructor as well as their peers, students were motivated to think carefully, from the early stages of the course, about which topic they wanted to pursue, what resources they would need in order to pursue it, and how best to present their ideas.

As a PhD candidate, I have not yet had the opportunity to teach a graduate seminar, but from the numerous research-intensive courses I have participated in I have learned that assigning students articles (classic and cutting-edge) to present to their peers is an effective way to foster motivation and learning. In addition to presenting others' work, I also required each student to present on a topic of their own choosing, receive verbal feedback from the rest of class and myself, and use the feedback to develop an article-length project.

Finally, since all the figures of interest in my research are non-canonical but highly compelling, I loved to explore new ideas with graduate students and invite them to collaborate with me when we had overlapping interests and complementary strengths. To my mind, an ideal graduate seminar is one that develops a close-knit community for those with shared interests. Members of such communities not only help each other to advance intellectually, but also offer other types of support, e.g. professional development. I have benefited greatly from such seminars at Tufts and Duke, and as a teacher I will always strive to create such communities for students.