

Statement of Diversity and Inclusive Pedagogy

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As a straight, white, cisgender man, I'm not, at first appearance, a prime example of inclusivity and diversity. I appear, for all purposes, as a consummate insider, privileged in virtue of the color of my skin, gender identity, sexual preferences, and educational background. I can't change these facts, but what I can do is use my own privilege to address issues of privilege and oppression. My journey in coming to understand and confront my own privilege and the dimensions of oppression to which I am and have been a party helps me to do just that. I grew up in rural Western Pennsylvania in coalmining and farming communities and came to college, for better and worse, bringing these experiences with me. I came with an intimate understanding of conservative values and a close-up view of poverty in rural America but also with the prejudices of a rural, monocultural upbringing. I began confronting these prejudices in my philosophy and sociology classes in college and continue to work on them today through my research and in diversity and inclusivity workshops, reading groups, and activist circles. These experiences of confronting my own prejudices and privileges are the foundation upon which I work to build relationships with my students to bring them into confrontation with their own.

My background helps me to build rapport with more privileged students while coaxing them into the difficult work of confronting their privileges and my present understanding and commitment to social justice as well as my experience teaching international students, first-generation college students, and students from historically underrepresented populations helps me to work with less privileged students in ways that, hopefully, enrich their educational experiences and equip them with tools for conceptualizing and (perhaps) working to dismantle some of the forms of oppression they face. Toward this end, I have adopted three strategies in my classrooms: inclusive syllabi, diversity of instruction methods, and explicit instruction in issues of privilege and oppression.

Students need to be able to see themselves as fledgling members of our intellectual community, but in too many cases, the image of the philosopher with which they are presented doesn't look like them or come a background like theirs. It is important to expose students to philosophers who break the stereotype. I do this by striving for gender and racial equity in my syllabi whenever possible, integrating work written by philosophers from a variety of traditions and backgrounds, and utilizing videos, podcasts, and blogs that present philosophical topics in ways accessible to students with varied kinds of cultural capital. My aim is to give each

student a way to see herself as a potential participant in our philosophical community.

I also try to create ways for students with different expectations and cultural capital to interact with each other and with course material. Like many instructors, I have found small-group work, short prompted writing, and built-in time for reflection to be valuable ways to engage students. Beyond these textbook methods, however, I have also found storytelling to be a useful tool. I use personal stories to open dialogue with my students, make difficult ideas more accessible, demonstrate the relevance of philosophy, and coax into the conversation students who are less comfortable with abstraction. Every student has a story, and there is much that we can learn from each other when we make space for sharing and exploring these stories in the context of philosophical investigation. My own narratives and those that students share afford us a way to engage with one another and our course material on common ground, and I often find that students who have been sitting silently in class suddenly come to life when the opportunity presents itself to share a personal anecdote.

Finally, I believe that issues of diversity and inclusion warrant explicit discussion in our classes. I speak openly with my students about the failure of diversity in professional philosophy and have frank discussions about the possible causes of the lack of representation of women and minorities among the professoriate. In my introductory and applied ethics courses, I include modules on privilege, oppression, and resistance that address the histories and lived experiences of minority populations. I also introduce students to recent philosophical work on implicit bias. Besides their intrinsic philosophical interest, the inclusion of these texts on my syllabi serves two purposes. First, it opens the eyes of students who identify with dominant cultural groups to issues about which they might be wholly or partially ignorant. They are encouraged to think about misogyny, sexual violence, racism, structural oppression, and xenophobia and the ways in which these phenomena structure our daily lives. Here, I use my own background as a student from a rural community who played football and joined a fraternity to connect with students who might otherwise become defensive in a discussion of these subjects. Second, these lessons reach out to students who have themselves suffered various forms of oppression as a result of their backgrounds and provide conceptual resources for thinking through their own experiences and confronting the oppressions they've faced.