

Statement on Contributions to Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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As an educator, I am committed to teaching and mentoring students from diverse demographic and social backgrounds. I care deeply about both physical and intellectual accessibility in the classroom, and I aim to create a comfortable atmosphere where everyone can grow as scholars. At the department level, I am committed to organizing social activities that foster a friendly and supportive department climate for graduate and undergraduate students, along with lowering barriers for professional development. As a graduate student teaching mentor, health and wellness mentor, graduate student representative to the faculty, and department social chair, I have sought to lower barriers to professional entry and support graduate students from diverse backgrounds. Outside academia, I am committed to tutoring and engaging with K-12 students as a force for social good, especially to help foster foundational skills in critical reasoning and writing.

From January 2020 through June 2021, I served as a graduate student teaching mentor. In this role, I helped graduate students implement new teaching strategies that better serve under-represented students. These include ensuring physical accessibility, promoting student-led activities, providing opportunities to write about course content online (e.g. in discussion threads and blog posts), and diversifying syllabi. As part of these efforts, I helped organize a workshop on Respect & Authority in the classroom, which covered strategies for managing disrespectful students. Additionally, I have observed numerous instructors and provided feedback on their teaching, with the aim of boosting student engagement, equity, and inclusion. As part of these observations, I tracked the proportion of contributions during class from students who present as women or minorities. In my debrief with instructors, we discuss specific strategies for enhancing equity in the classroom and promoting a wider range of voices, such as designating leaders for each question within small groups. Think-pair-share activities are another way to improve equity by giving every student a specific role in advancing class discussion and collective educational objectives. I would very much like to continue this teaching mentorship role in the future. It is a great way to mentor instructors while improving equity and inclusion at the classroom level.

In my own teaching, I strive to lower barriers to physical accessibility, promoting inclusion for students with physical or learning disabilities. During class, I make sure that all materials are clearly legible and easily seen (even from the back of the classroom). I frequently use a document camera to zoom in on documents to the biggest font size possible. Before erasing any portion of the blackboard, I take a picture which I later post on the course page so that students can easily view and find it. Likewise, I upload all lecture materials in an easily readable format, and I make all course readings compatible with audio readers. These practices are informed by my own experiences as a student: I have found that it is often difficult to take detailed course notes in a pain-free manner, making it necessary to ask the professor or a classmate for notes. Emotionally, it can be difficult to ask someone for this favor, since it typically involves owning up to one of your own limitations (which can feel embarrassing). While teaching online during COVID, I uploaded my lecture videos to YouTube so that students could watch them with closed captioning. Upon request, I am happy to make audio recordings available of lectures.

I also strive to promote intellectual accessibility within the classroom. As someone with a background in both engineering and the humanities, I am especially sensitive to students' varied needs based on their different educational backgrounds and current learning strategies. Many of the philosophy courses I teach attract both STEM students who need a humanities credit and humanities students who need a quantitative reasoning credit. These sets of students typically have distinct needs and fears regarding course content. I am committed to helping students from all backgrounds renegotiate their learning habits to adapt to unfamiliar intellectual challenges. In writing-based courses, I hold special workshops and lectures on how to write philosophy papers. In technical or formal courses, I hold additional office hours to help students learn problem-solving strategies and techniques. As the semester progresses, I discreetly reach out to students who are struggling with the material to schedule additional office hours. I firmly believe that with proper guidance and support, all students can overcome prior gaps in their knowledge or training. Many of my students have reported that they made it through class thanks largely to my patience and dedication in helping them, meeting with them, and providing additional resources.

I am committed to continuously updating my teaching strategies to better serve underrepresented students. As part of additional teacher training, I have attended numerous workshops focusing on how to create and maintain an inviting and non-alienating classroom atmosphere, even when discussing controversial topics. These workshops include how stereotype threat and a growth mindset affect student learning, how general campus climate and student microaggressions can adversely impact learning outcomes, how to handle challenging classroom conversations through dialogue, and how to address political and social issues outside the classroom. I look forward to learning new strategies through future training.

At the department level, I currently serve as a health and wellness mentor to the graduate students. In this capacity, I have run workshops on work-life balance, boundary setting, and healthy writing habits. Additionally, I created and disseminated an extensive guide on how to survive graduate school, aimed especially at finishing up coursework and writing a dissertation. This guide provides advice on initiating and maintaining a healthy mentor-mentee relationship with department faculty, developing a regular writing routine, researching while teaching and taking classes, applying to conferences and for travel grants, publishing, ergonomics, mental health, imposter syndrome, and engaging in social activities. I also regularly reach out to the graduate students to see if they are struggling with any issues of motivation, mental health, or alienation. In the past, I have organized special social activities with relatively introverted graduate students to help promote their inclusion in the department. I hope to serve in a similar health and wellness capacity in the future, so that I can actively mentor graduate students on how to succeed in graduate school and the profession.

While serving as a graduate student representative to the faculty, I designed a pronoun policy to help prevent the misgendering of graduate students in my department. We created an easily accessible Google spreadsheet where department members can write their names and preferred pronouns, with a separate tab for each current seminar. Seminar leaders then post a link to this spreadsheet on their course webpages and encourage all students enrolled to complete it. This policy has greatly reduced instances of misgendering and raised awareness of issues facing gender-nonconforming students. Three years later, it is still going strong!

To help promote social inclusion and interactions between the graduate students and faculty, I organized both a weekly department tea and our annual picnic for two years. Tea-time provides a low stakes environment where graduate students can mingle with each other and faculty. I would happily organize similar events in the future to foster a collegial department climate. I have also routinely participated in our department's annual COMPASS program, a two-day workshop where undergraduates from underrepresented groups in philosophy learn about philosophy graduate school. As a COMPASS volunteer, I have mentored students over coffee, Zoom, and email, provided comments on research, led multiple research discussions illustrating what philosophy conferences and presentations are like, and answered questions about the graduate school application process.

Outside my department, I have volunteered as a tutor to help middle and high school students with their homework. As an undergraduate in Pittsburgh, I volunteered with Higher Achievement, working with middle school students on mathematics. In Ann Arbor, I have volunteered with 826 Michigan, where in addition to tutoring, I have helped underserved elementary school students in Ypsilanti with reading and spelling. For the past three years, I have been a co-organizer for our department's Philosophy with Kids program. Through fun activities, we introduce fourth and fifth graders to various parts of philosophy, including aesthetics, ethics, philosophy of science, epistemology, and metaphysics. As an organizer, I have communicated with public school teachers interested in our program, and I have organized and trained graduate student volunteers. I would greatly enjoy leading a similar Philosophy with Kids program in the future.