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Please note that all sections are bookmarked in the PDF for ease of access.

Statement of Teaching and Learning

In my classes, I have two overarching goals: to help my students learn about salient philosophical debates and to help them learn how to think more philosophically rigorously. A key aspect of these goals is that I see myself as *helping* my students learn. Rather than understanding learning as a product that is delivered to students, I understand learning as a process that students do themselves (Ambrose et al. 2010: 3). Because I adopt this view, I envision myself as an assistant to my students' learning: using readings central to debates in the course-specific area, I aim to help clarify tricky concepts, theories, and arguments with which my students may struggle. I accomplish this by utilizing structured and guided activities to help foster a community of learners, who generate understanding together.¹

My methods and dedication to teaching earned recognition with university-wide teaching award and a departmental teaching award. I also completed a Certificate for College Teaching, which required extensive work. The details of these awards and the certificate are included after this statement.

I use metacognitive activities and inclusive course design to accomplish my goals. Metacognition is “the process of reflecting on and directing one’s own thinking” (National Research Council 2001: 78). Since learning is a process that students do themselves,² metacognition aides student learning by guiding students to monitor, evaluate, and improve their ability to learn. While metacognition has been around for a while,³ it is now being recognized as a tool for equity and inclusion.⁴ I discuss some of the ways I use inclusive course design and metacognition as a tool for equity and inclusion in my diversity statement; here I’ll describe one in more detail.

The Muddiest Point strategy is one of my favorites, and I implement various versions of it.⁵ With about ten minutes left in class, students take a few minutes to write down what they found most confusing about the day’s material. They do not write their names on these, so the papers are anonymous. After completing this, they crumple up their papers, close their eyes, and throw them in the air. The students then pick up one of the crumpled pieces of paper and try to answer the question (or explain the idea) in writing.⁶ At the end of class, the students turn the papers in to me, and I review them to see if there are common things that students find confusing. Immediately after class (or, if I have classes back-to-back, after my last class), I review these cards and look for common points of confusion. I then send these to different groups of students, who answer one to two questions as a writing assignment. I grade these as a low-stakes assignment, making it clear that, so long as they try their best to answer the questions and show that they’ve used the reading to do so, they get full credit.⁷ Then, I begin the following class with a review of these. I first open it up to students, if they want to participate and answer the questions; if not, I use their responses to help elaborate how they should understand the material and warn them of

¹ For more on this view and how it differs from other approaches, see Barbara Rogoff, “Developing Understanding of the Idea of Communities of Learners,” *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, Vol. 1 (1994): pp. 209-229.

² See my teaching statement about this, where I endorse Ambrose et al.’s (2010) understanding of learning.

³ Nancy Chick, the Assistant Director of the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt, notes that one of the three key findings in *How People Learn*—the synthesis of decades of research on the science of learning by the National Academy of Sciences—is the effectiveness of metacognitive approaches to education. See [this excellent article](#) for a great summary of research and methodologies; my approach to teaching has been heavily influenced by it.

⁴ Recent workshops exploring this have been held at [Columbia University](#) and the [University of Colorado, Boulder](#).

⁵ See Angelo and Cross (1993) for an initial statement of this long-standing metacognitive strategy.

⁶ See [Sathy and Hogan’s \(2019\)](#) article in the Chronicle of Higher Education for a variation of this, which is not anonymous..

⁷ Including low-stakes assignments is another suggestion for inclusive course design made in the Sathy and Hogan (2019). See my diversity statement about how this can help avoid stereotype threat and imposter syndrome.

possible misunderstandings.⁸

Learning to identify gaps in one's own understanding helps students become self-regulated learners, which is especially helpful for both first-generation students and students who are first exploring a new area of study.⁹ This Muddiest Point activity helps realize this goal by emphasizing that confusion is part of learning, which destigmatizes and normalizes the experience of being confused. Please see my diversity statement for more details about this inclusive practice.

Of course, this version of the activity is not compatible with socially distanced learning. But this activity is accomplished online using Backchannel Chat, which allows students to post their muddiest ideas anonymously. The students now do this and reply to one post, instead of writing them and crumpling them up, and then I do everything else the same. Having to transition to remote teaching while finishing my PhD was an intense experience, but my approach—guided by my values of being transparent and collaborative with students—resulted in a rich and successful five weeks. Please see my student evaluations from Spring 2020 for evidence of this. Additionally, I am actively committed to developing my online pedagogy to make my classes in AY 2020-2021 successful. I worked with Professor Julia Staffel over Summer 2020 to develop a six-hour departmental training for online teaching, in which we developed modules on synchronous and asynchronous teaching. I am dedicated to making my teaching as effective for my students as possible, in whatever delivery method is necessary, and I continue to do research on the best ways to create a community of learners in online environments.

Another inclusive course design strategy that I implement is reducing high-stakes assignments such as tests.¹⁰ This deemphasizes the importance of a one-off performance and allows me to emphasize the importance of understanding and learning. My favorite way of doing this is allowing my students to make up points on tests. I do not mark the correct answers on my exams (which include multiple choice and short answer questions), but indicate whether they missed a question or lost points on a response. My students then can meet with me and make up points by identifying the correct answer choice and explain both what led them to choosing an incorrect answer and why the new answer is correct. I allow them to do this twice for each test; this deemphasizes the stress of coming in the first time and allows us to identify material together that they may need to further review. If they miss something on the first meeting, I point them to the relevant material that will help them develop a better understanding.

I use other methods and strategies of inclusive course design, some of which I detail in my diversity statement and my methods of assessment in my teaching portfolio. Please see these for more evidence of my dedication to inclusive and effective teaching.

⁸ This activity can also be broken up into two different activities. One variation doesn't include the writing assignment; after we've had a discussion, I collect the papers and identify common areas of confusion, which I then discuss during the beginning of the next class. Another variation skips the in-class activity, and has students write down their Muddiest Point at the end of class; I then use these for writing assignments.

⁹ See [this article](#) for more information about these benefits.

¹⁰ This is also suggested in Sathy and Hogan (2019).

Certificate in College Teaching

The University of Colorado at Boulder has a Graduate Teacher Program whose purpose is to help graduate students across the university develop their teaching skills.

Certification is a lengthy process involving the following components:

1. *Twenty university-wide teaching workshops.* Workshops focus on topics such as dealing with problems in the classroom, lecturing skills, and understanding teaching students with diverse learning styles. I attended many sessions on inclusive teaching for diverse students.
2. *Twenty discipline-specific teaching workshops.* Within the philosophy department, workshops cover topics such as grading, designing successful classes and activities, and engaging students in discussion of sensitive topics. I also earned hours for this by engaging in a Peer Teaching Program, in which fellow graduate instructors attended one another's classes and met to review and discuss pedagogy.
3. *Two videotape consultations.* On two separate occasions I was videotaped as I taught, and then met with the department's lead graduate teacher to watch and discuss the videotaped classes.

I completed the Certificate in College teaching during the Spring 2020 semester. A copy of the certificate is available upon request.

Graduate Student Teaching Excellence Award

Each academic year, the Graduate School at CU Boulder recognizes up to ten graduate teachers with awards for excellence in teaching. Given how few students receive this award, it is both competitive and highly sought-after.

The process begins in the fall semester, when a faculty member from each department selects on or two graduate teachers to nominate. I was nominated by the Philosophy Department for the 2018-2019 academic year. Nominees then submit evidence of their teaching excellence, including a statement of teaching philosophy, copy of syllabi, faculty observation reports, and complete student evaluation data for all the classes they taught. Members of the university's teaching awards committee evaluate these materials and then make multiple unannounced class visits to determine which nominees receive the award.

I accepted this award with great pleasure at the end of Spring 2019. Given my commitment and dedication to teaching, receiving this award is one of my proudest achievements in graduate school.

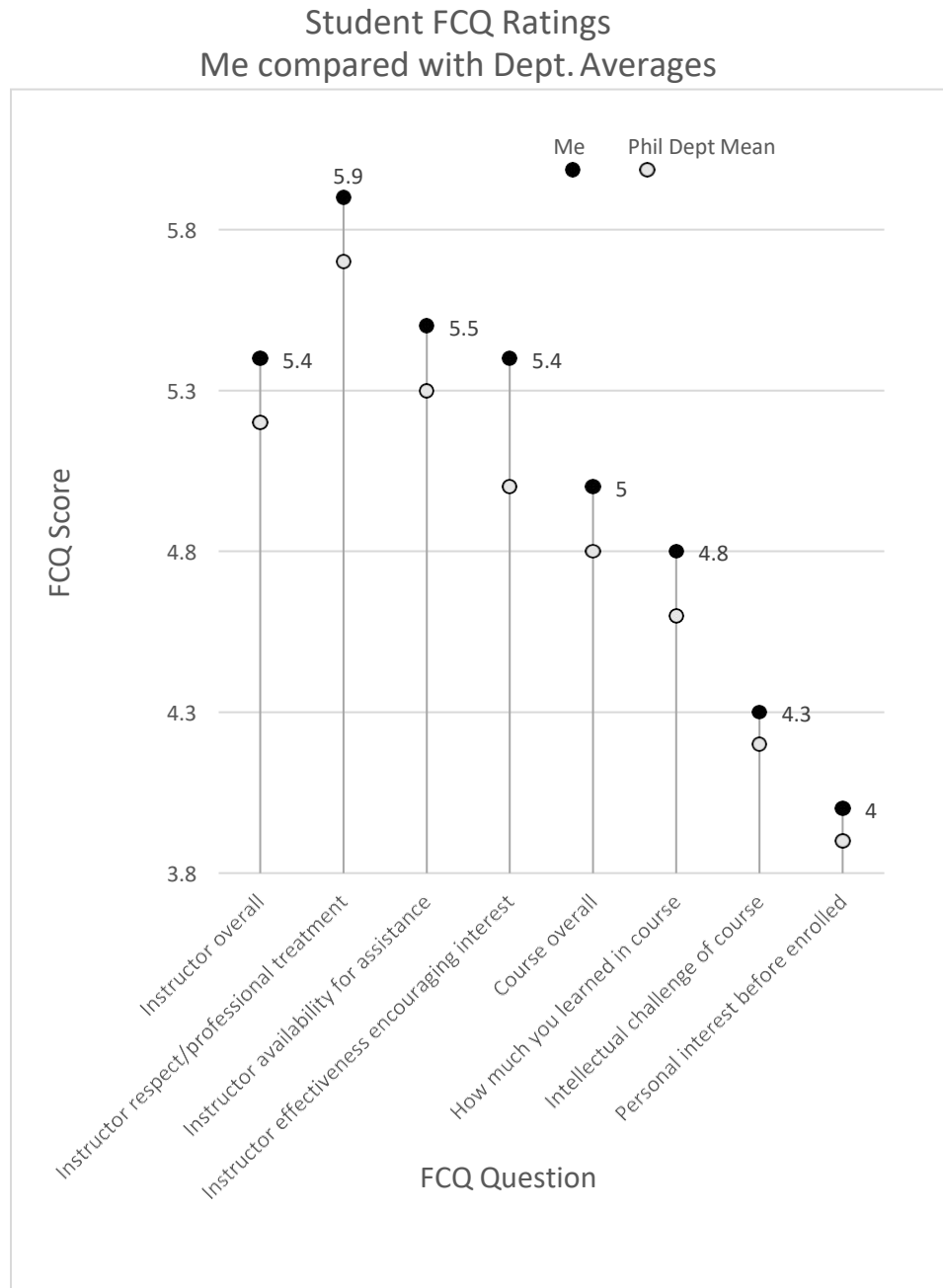
A copy of the award is available upon request.

Faculty Course Questionnaires/Student Evaluations

Spring 2017 to Spring 2020

Quantitative


The following graph compares my mean FCQ ratings as an instructor with the departmental averages, from Spring 2017 to Spring 2020.¹¹ Over this period, I taught 12 classes. I used data from the Tableau website (located [here](#)).¹² On every question, my mean scores are higher than the departmental mean.



¹¹ These do not include data from Spring 2020 or Summer 2020 because questions asked on the FCQ changed in Spring 2020. I have included qualitative comments from Spring 2020 below, and will submit this data upon request!

¹² If you prefer a URL: https://public.tableau.com/profile/fcq.office#!/vizhome/Boulder_FCQ/Boulder

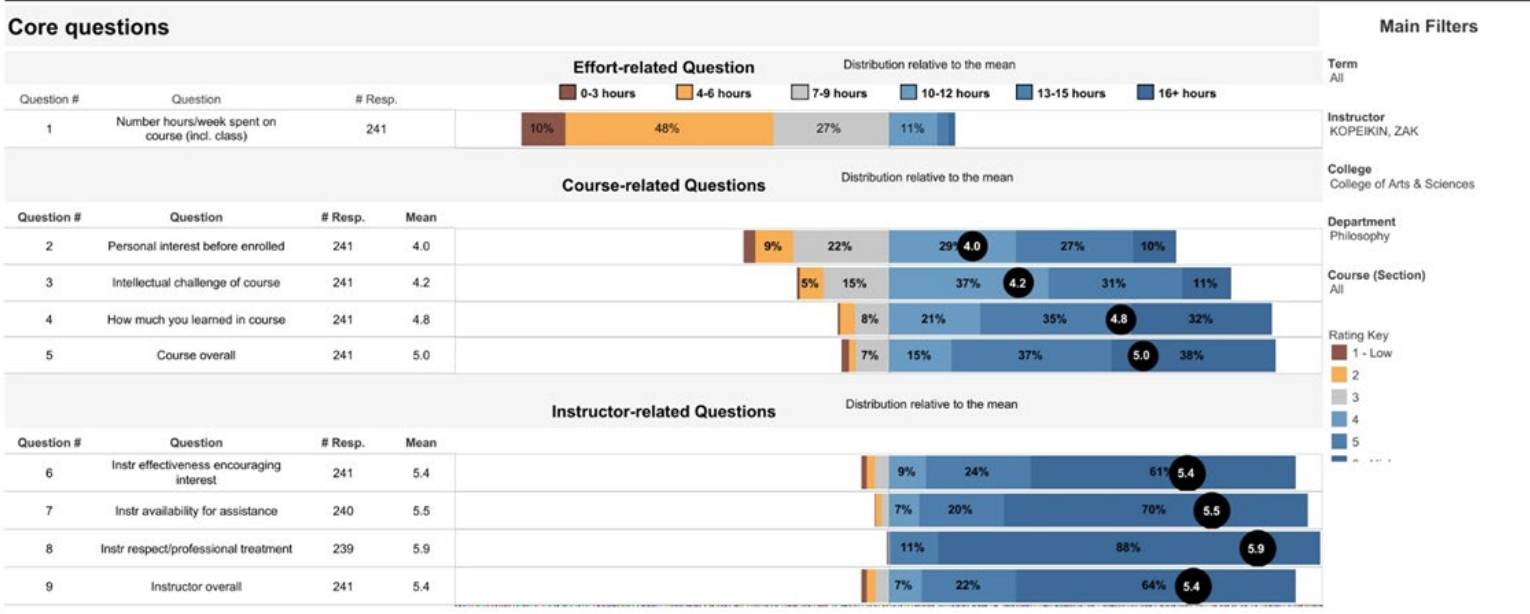
Below I have two graphs from the Tableau website. The first is the data summary from my FCQs; the second is from the department as a whole. Please note my high response rate (88.93%).




Instructor: KOPEIKIN, ZAK

Term: (multiple)
Campus: Main Campus
College: College of Arts & Sciences..

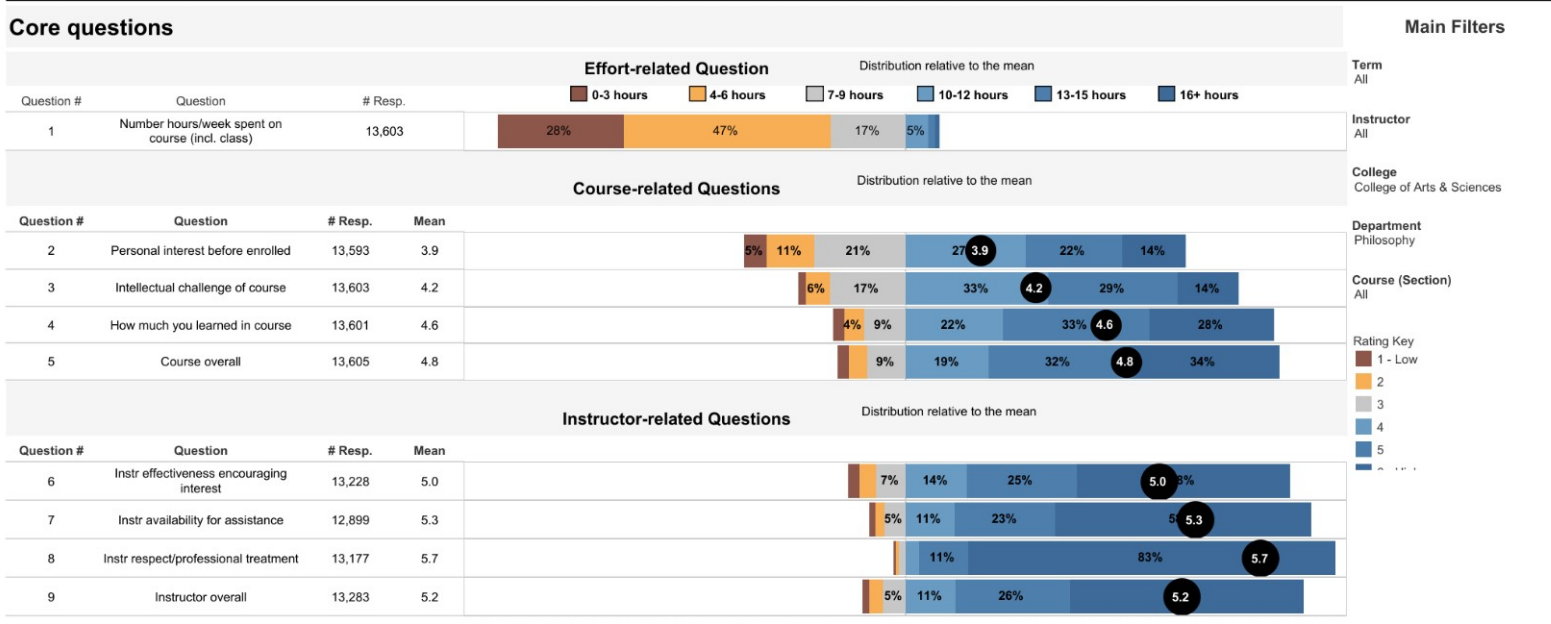
Responses: 241
Enrolled: 271
% Responses: 88.93%



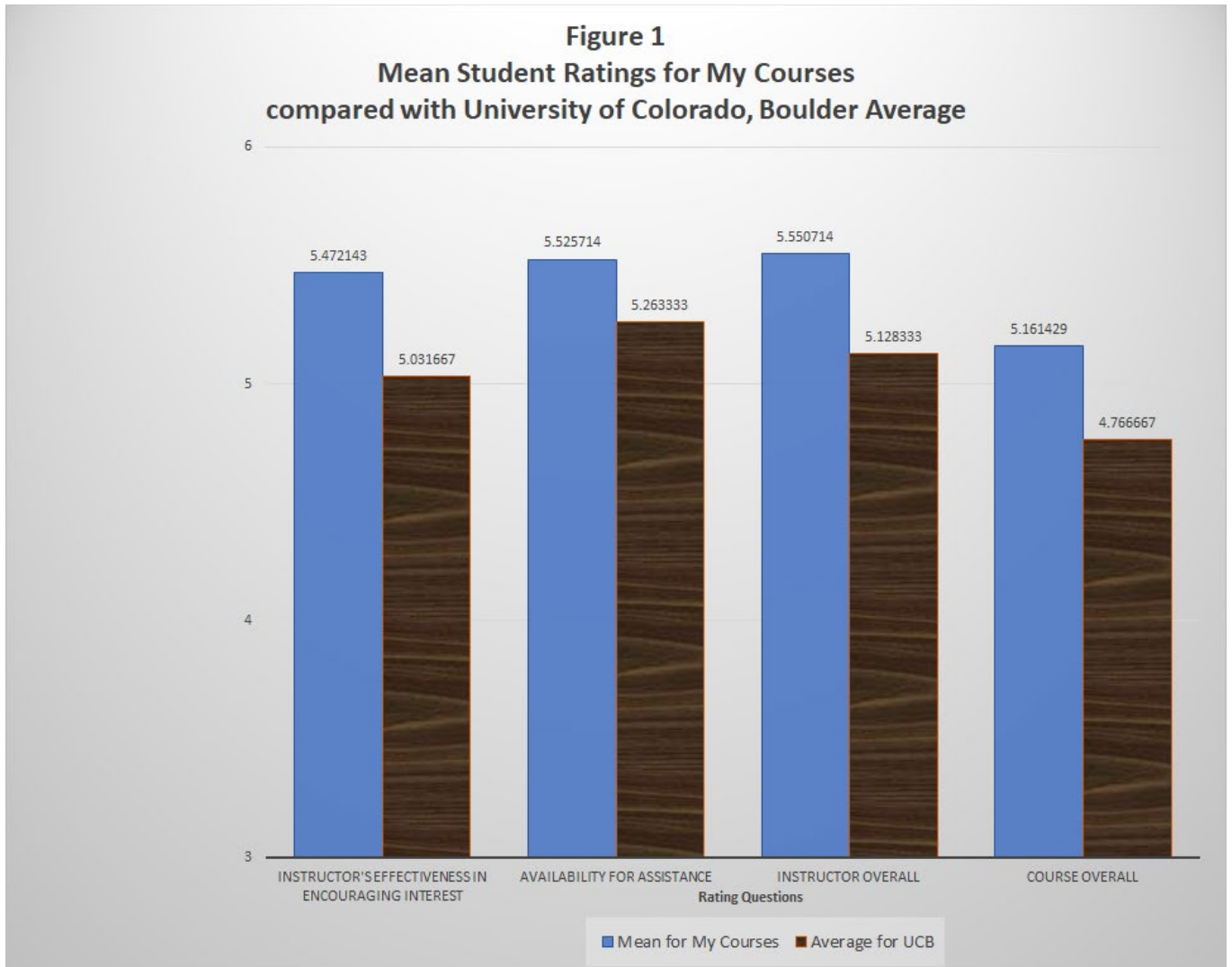


Term: (multiple)
Campus: Main Campus
College: College of Arts & Sciences..

Responses: 12601
Enrolled: 18669
% Responses: 67.50%



The following displays my averages compared to University averages for all classes in which I was the instructor of record. My students' evaluations rank me higher than University averages for encouraging interest in course material, being available for assistance, as an overall instructor, and for my course overall.



Qualitative Evaluations, Summer 2019
All Student Comments from Phil 1400 (Philosophy and the Sciences)

Zak is a great instructor. He makes sure that the class is not really hard or really easy. He makes time out of his day to make sure that students understand the material and will do anything to make sure you understand the material. He makes the class fun and tries to make half the class student-led to make sure we understand the material.

I appreciated the metacognition journals as a guide for reflecting on my work and progress in the class. I also really liked the writing assignments as a way to review material for the test. I liked the pace of this

class. I would have maybe liked more opportunities to write my own thoughts and reflect on the philosophical concepts and ideas — maybe less multiple choice and more short answer on the test. I feel like if I have to personally grapple with instead of just reiterate the ideas, I learn them better.

With this being a transition for me to this college lifestyle, Zak really made this one of the smoothest transitions I could have. He was always willing to give an extra hand if needed, and worked with my schedule to do office hours and having quick meetings. The material was always well prepared and he put me in the best position to be successful during this class. The assignments were always useful for the quizzes and getting a better understanding, and they never felt like just busy work.

Awesome class! Had fun and learned a lot. I felt as though Zak had a genuine interest in whether or not we actually learned the material, and he was not as concerned with arbitrary deadlines. Very accommodating, and was always available for meetings. The course felt very balanced in that the material was challenging, but we were given adequate time and opportunity to understand all of it. I would have enjoyed a bit more class discussion, but as this was a summer course I understand that there really wasn't a ton of time for it.

Mr. Kopeikin is a fantastic teacher with an obvious passion for the material that he presents to us. He can make complicated, stuff philosophy interesting and thought provoking.

His passion comes across when he teaches and he is always available to help students in whatever way they need.

I really appreciated Zak's style of instructing as his actions showed he cared more about the students understanding the material rather than memorizing enough to pass. I think once he has refined his craft more he will be the kind of professor that the education system is missing.

Overall, great course. The instructor obviously has a lot of passion for the subject. The pace could be a little fast at times.

I like how available you were with office hours and email. You clearly worked very hard for this class and I appreciated that. It was kind of distracting when people came in late every day however, so I wonder if you would consider implementing a small grade associated with on-time attendance. As far as the overall concepts go, I thought you did a good job of thoroughly explaining everything.

Could include more contents, make the intro part shorter.

Zak is an amazing instructor that really cares about all students actually learning the new material.

Zak is an awesome teacher! Very passionate about philosophy, accessible, and an overall great professor

Was a fantastic session and a great learning experience. Keep up the good work!!

Great teacher wanted to see students improve and learn

Zak was great, super enthusiastic about the material & took plenty of time to make sure everyone

understood the material as well. One of the best instructors I've had at CU.

Qualitative Evaluations, Spring 2020

All student comments from two sections of Phil 1200 (Contemporary Social Problems)

Something that I really appreciated was the amount of feedback the Dr. Zak provided to me on every assignment I completed. He acknowledged and commended me when I did assignments well, and always provided clarification when I was confused about topics. I also like that he gave us so many opportunities to better our work and meet with him to display that we had developed a better understanding on course content if we did not initially have it. Dr. Zak always has our best interest in mind and really cares about us understanding the material, not just memorizing it so we can get a grade.

One of the best teachers that I have had all 2 years of college. Was very helpful during the Coronavirus Pandemic. Had a very organized schedule and plan for the whole year.

I've had a lot of professors and I will say that Zak is definitely one of the best. He truly cares about his students growing academically in a meaningful way, and also about their overall wellbeing, in a way that is unmatched. He was consistently able to get through to students so that the class was interesting and fun. I feel that because of his expertise, this was the most authentically engaging and personally relevant class I've ever taken. Wishing him all the best.

Overall, the class was a very enjoyable experience. The class was very well laid out, and I never had any questions about due dates or class policies. There was always plenty of time to do assignments and readings, and I never felt pressed on time. Zak was a very proficient professor, and the lectures were always clear and laid out. The review at the beginning of each lecture was very helpful. When we switched online, we began doing weekly discussions. I find the weekly discussions to be extremely helpful, and I believe they should be implemented into future semesters. They really solidified my ideas and thoughts, and bouncing other ideas off peers and going super in depth really felt great. Overall, the class was a great experience.

Zak you were one of my favorite teachers!! Never had someone so real and understanding. You honestly dealt with this crisis the best out of any of my professors. Thanks for being awesome, gonna miss this class.

The most effective part of this course was the detailed feedback which we could always count on to receive.

Zak is by far the best professor I have had thus far at CU. He is an incredible lecturer and could not have made his expectations more clear. He is a fair grader, clearly explains what you did wrong, and offers you countless opportunities to do well in his class. I would recommend him to anyone

really enjoyed this class and zak helped it to be a great learning experience as well!

I loved that you were willing to change the class structure due to the coronavirus. It was extremely helpful to have a lighter workload during this extremely stressful time. You are very fair, which is very much appreciated!

Zak is an amazing teacher! He is very open to feedback and he consistently makes changes to material, teaching style, etc based upon his student's needs. Zak truly cares about his students' well being and he always goes the extra mile to reach out and makes himself available to help. He does a great job of

creating community within the class which has helped me enjoy the class more and get more out of the material through collaboration. Zak may not have many years of teaching experience, but it has never showed. He is very organized, engaging, easy to understand, and overall a great person. 10/10 would recommend taking as many classes as possible with Zak.

Great professor. Definitely take this class with him if you get the chance.

He is a good teacher. I loved the topics that we would talk about but I think that his remote class is way more engaging than on-campus class. Sometimes I would not pay attention to because of the constant talking. I really like talking to other students and getting their input.

One of my favorite college professors. Really cares about his students and class. Made information engaging and challenged me in a good way

Great class and Zak was very good at changing the class when online learning started. He helped me understand the material I was struggling with and does a great job helping those in need.

This class has been a new challenge for me never taking a Philosophy class before, but Zak has made learning an environment that makes you expand your mind to think differently while learning philosophy at the same time. I really like teaching style of reading the readings at home and then him explaining them in depth in class while students like my self can ask questions and provide our own examples. I really enjoy this part hearing other peoples take on the readings because it allows me to change my perspective or see someone elses to better understand the class and subject.

I could tell how much work you put into the transition to online teaching. I liked the predictable structure of the course and that you laid out all the assignments clearly in the syllabus. I didn't find making up multiple choice/short answer questions for reading homeworks helpful. I appreciated your energy in lectures.

Dr. Zak has been one of my favorite instructors. Dr. Zak is so enthusiastic and passionate about his teaching and he makes being in class an absolute joy. He covers topics very thoroughly and provides lots of room for questions, discussion, and clarity. He is very encouraging and accepting of all input and perspectives, which makes me more willing and comfortable to participate. Throughout the transition to and continuation of remote learning, Zak has consistently been flexible, considerate of his students, and done all in his power to make the change as easy and accommodating as possible. Zak embraces criticism from his students in order to improve and be the best instructor he can. In every lecture and interaction with Zak it is evident that he is passionate about teaching to the best of his abilities in order to give his students the best opportunities for success.

This course was okay, Mr Kopelin was great, but the curriculum was loaded and not very interesting

Dr. Zak put together a wonderful class, with lots of discussion and argument evaluation. His assignments were all worth my time, and fit in very nicely with what we were learning, and were structured in a way that made sense, and never felt like busy work. Dr. Zak also created an environment where it was very easy to talk in the classroom and voice and opinion or argument or something.

Zak! One of the best teachers I have had the ability to take a class from during my time as a student at boulder. The class is very engaging and the group discussions really help to see all sides of the topics brought up from the readings. The readings are extremely interesting and can be related to the world events that are happening at that current time. The muddiest point assignments are awesome as they

allow the frequently asked questions that everyone has to be answered. it allows everyone to fully understand the material more. I loved the class and I would take another instantly if it was taught by you.

BPHIL 1200 (009): Contemporary Social Problems (Lecture)

Great guy who cares about his students. Puts in a lot of effort and it shows. He is a very smart guy who is real with his students. I admire his vulnerability and honesty. He is extremely understanding and wants people to do be better humans. Great professor, great guy.

Thank you so much for everything! I appreciate how helpful and understanding and kind you are, and I wish more classes cared about their students and their well-being like you do. I hope you stay safe, healthy, and happy, because you deserve the best for being there for all of us during this weird, awful time. I've honestly never heard anyone say a bad thing about you, only words of kindness and admiration. We're all gonna miss you once this class is over, so again, thank you for everything you've done for us.

He's a great teacher. Super supportive and understanding of our situation and is always willing to chat more about any topic. He was always willing to re explain and elaborate.

This professor was extremely helpful, especially when we started to go to online learning. We had great in class discussions and the homework assignments were very helpful, I learned a lot.

Zak was a great professor who constantly strived to improve the course and wanted to make sure it was constructed to be understood the best way possible. Zak was very approachable and available and encouraged us to go to office hours. I really appreciated how he took the time to make detailed comments on all of our papers that were specific and showed that he cared about us as individuals. I also appreciate Zak being very understanding and helpful with my anxiety

Zak was a great professor, he always knew what he was talking about and was very supportive and flexible with students.

Professor Kopeikin ended up being my favorite professor this semester. He made it easy to talk to him about not only issues pertaining to class, but also personal issues I ended up going through this semester. He is a very understanding man and has handled this switch to online learning very well.

Having Zak as a professor this semester was such a blessing. He is by far one of my favorite professors I have ever had at CU. He is engaging, caring, and so helpful. When everything switched to online learning, Zak was able to really work with our class and he was very flexible, understanding, and still very passionate about his teaching which inspires his students to do their best. He related class material to current issues in the real world and made each lesson very interesting. He also was finishing his dissertation while teaching us and still made sure that his students were his top priority. He often asked for feedback and wanted to work with us and set us up to succeed as much as he could, instead of proposing one method and sticking with it for the semester he listened to all of us individually. I joined this class just to fill credits on my schedule and I never thought that I would be so interested in a random philosophy class, but his excitement and teaching style was able to get through to me as a student and made me think and see the world and social issues in a completely new way, and I learned a lot of information I will carry with me for the rest of my time. I thank Zak for everything this semester and I hope somebody gives this man a raise because he deserves it.

You were truly there for all of the kids in your class, even before coronavirus. Not many professors/instructors were, but you did everything you possibly could to make sure we knew you had our back and wanted us to succeed not only in this class but in all of them. So all I have to say is thank you for everything you did this semester.

I love this class because Dr. Kopeikin made it incredibly interesting. I appreciate how he recognized students as humans during the transition to online. I think he understands how hard student's work in college and that empathy is reflected through his reasonable workload. Overall Dr. Kopeikin did a great job this semester. Thankyou!

Overall, a really great teacher. I would've liked to have more discussion with classmates considering the relevance of the course material. I really enjoyed getting to know you this semester and thank you for your effective communication during the transition to online classes amidst the pandemic.

Huge fan of this class! No notes! Encore!

Zak is the man. Very respectful professor that made sure everyone had a chance to participate in class if they wanted to. Respected everyone's opinion and made sure everyone understood what was going on in class.

Dr. Zak is genuinely so nice. He was so patient during everything with corona and I'm so happy for him that he was able to defend his dissertation and get his "dr" title. He is really passionate about what he teaches.

I really liked that our professor spent a lot of time checking in on how we were feeling about the structure and material of the class. He was always in communication with us and was extremely helpful on an instructor and personal level when school shut down due to coronavirus. I really appreciated how he kept us updated and took our feedback into consideration. Zac did a great job of respecting each of us as student, and as people. He also incorporated a lot of current issues into our class assignments and discussions which helped bring our learning into the real world.

I had an extremely difficult semester and Dr. Zak was the only professor to understand and treat me humanely. Keep being the incredible professor you are. I learned the most in this class and this was the class I always talked about to my peers. Everything in this class was amazing.

Faculty Teaching Observations

Copies of these teaching observations can be obtained from the Karen Sites (Karen.Sites@colorado.edu), the Graduate Administrator for the Philosophy Department at CU Boulder.



University of Colorado
Boulder

Department of Philosophy
Hellems 167
232 UCB
Boulder, Colorado 80309-0232

Office: (303) 492 6132
Fax: (303) 492 8386
<http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy>

Teaching Observation Report for Zak Kopeikin

Phil 1200 Contemporary Social Problems

Class meeting: February 19, 2020, 3pm-4.15pm

Reading: Peter Singer, Parental Choice and Human Involvement

This observation report is on a 75-minute meeting of Zak Kopeikin's 'Contemporary Social Problems' class in the Spring of 2020. This was the second class meeting devoted to the question of whether the use of reproductive technologies should be allowed, which would let people engage in genetic selection or genetic engineering for their children. Previously the class had watched a short video explaining the relevant technologies, and they had started discussing Singer's article. Zak started with a brief recap of the previous class and then presented the agenda for the day. He told the students they would be talking about the difference between genetic selection and genetic engineering, then talk about three objections against the genetic supermarket from Singer's paper, and then end with a couple of activities on the material ('muddiest point' and discussion).

Zak structured the majority of the class as a PowerPoint assisted lecture, into which he incorporated questions to the students. He started by asking the students to explain the difference between selection and engineering, which a student was readily able to do. He then moved on to explain the first objection to freely allowing people to use the 'genetic supermarket'; the objection that this would reduce diversity in society. Singer's response is that not all types of diversity are good, and that this is not a reason not to initially allow people to use these technologies. If there was a harmful loss in diversity, problematic technologies could still be banned again later. Zak used this to introduce the distinction between an intrinsic and a positional good. The idea is that some goods are beneficial to a person regardless of how many other people have it (such as longevity), but other goods lose their value if everyone has them (such as being tall). Zak discussed with the students whether other goods were intrinsic or positional, such as being able to run fast or being intelligent. They concluded that many goods have aspects of both, i.e. they benefit you personally, but they also help you get ahead if the good is not available to everyone. This complicates the idea that perhaps we should allow people to use genetic technologies to secure intrinsic, but not positional goods for their children. Yet, as Singer points out, if we allow people to secure positional goods for their children, this could easily lead to a collective action problem that makes everyone worse off. The last objection Zak introduced was the objection that genetic enhancement is in conflict with the idea that people should have equality of opportunity. He asked the students to explain what that meant, and they talked about how access to genetic technologies for the wealthy but not the poor would worsen societal inequality.

Zak then moved on to discussion various solutions to the problem of how to regulate genetic engineering. The proposals were: banning all or most selection, or subsidizing selection in some way, either by making it available to everyone, or setting up some kind of lottery or subsidy system that would help poorer people access the technology. Zak and the students brought up various problems with each proposal, such as the cost of universal access, and the problem that bans cannot be globally enforced, leading to rich people being able to circumvent local regulations. Zak ended the class by passing out notecards on which students were asked to write the "muddiest point" from class, which he then collected with the intention to use them to generate discussion in the following class.

Zak has a wonderful presence in the classroom. He creates a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, his explanations are very clear and well-structured, and he is a skilled user of PowerPoint. I was a little disappointed that we didn't have time to get to the discussion/activity that was on the

agenda at the beginning of class, because I thought that the students had very interesting things to say throughout the lecture. Of course, it's sometimes a little hard to tell in advance how long an activity will take, but I thought that despite his obvious talents as a lecturer, Zak might want to shorten the amount of time he lectures in one stretch. I think that 75 min is a long time for people to pay attention to the same activity, so breaking things up a little more might be beneficial. For example, the part of the class that was about positional and intrinsic goods would have presented a great opportunity for some small group discussion to break things up a bit and get everyone talking.

From my seat in the back, I could tell that while most students were fairly attentive, some of them were using their laptops and/or phones for activities that were clearly not class-related (one girl shopped for sorority t-shirts during the entire class). Having now seen the difference across a number of classrooms, I have become convinced that it's better to restrict the use of laptops in the classroom. Zak might consider banning electronics or at least asking students who use laptops to sit in the back to avoid distracting others.

Overall, I was very impressed with Zak's class. He is a gifted presenter, and he knows how to incorporate a variety of activities to enhance his teaching, such as short videos, or the muddiest point activity. His students are lucky to have him and I am confident that they will learn a lot in his class.



Julia Staffel
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Julia.Staffel@colorado.edu

Teaching Observation: Zak Kopeikin

Reviewer: Professor Graham Oddie
Class: Critical Thinking (Introductory Logic) (PHIL 1440)
Topic: Counterexamples to validity
Date: Monday, September 24, 2018 (2.00pm - 2.50pm)
Location: Hale 260

The class I observed was in the course PHIL 1440 *Critical Thinking*, which used to be called *Introductory Logic*. In the catalog the course is described thus:

Develops students' skills in evaluating arguments and other aspects of critical thinking, focusing on the ways people reason and attempt to justify their beliefs. Activities may include modeling arguments, detecting common fallacies, examining the use (and misuse) of scientific evidence, and learning the basics of symbolic logic.

This is a remarkably apposite summary of the topics and skills Zak gently and skillfully guided the students through in the class.

The main focus of the class was the construction of counterexamples to validity. *Validity* is the fundamental concept in logic and deductive reasoning and students have to master that concept thoroughly if they are to develop adeptness at real critical thinking. To master the concept of validity you have to acquire the skill of demonstrating the *invalidity* of concrete arguments, and you can do that only through patient and repeated practice.

An argument is deductively valid if and only if the truth of the premises *guarantees* the truth of the conclusion. This means that if an argument is valid there can be no *possible* circumstances in which the premises are all true while the conclusion is false. There are two ways of demonstrating invalidity. The most reliable method is to find what philosophers call a *counterexample*: a possible circumstance in which the premises would be true but the conclusion would be false.

A second strategy (which is not quite as reliable as the first) is to find a parallel argument with the same *logical form* that has *actually* true premises and an *actually* false conclusion. If the two arguments are of the same logical form then (so the reasoning goes) their validity stands or falls together. Since the parallel argument that has been introduced to test the validity of the original has premises which are true in fact, and a conclusion which is false in fact, it is obviously invalid. So an argument which shares its form will be also be invalid. This second method can be unreliable because, depending on how one defines logical form, one can have two arguments with the same logical form one of which is valid and the other of which is invalid. But this is a rather rare phenomenon in fact and so, even if this method is not fool-proof, in practice it is still a pretty good indicator of invalidity. And it is a standard test in most textbooks.

Zak took the students through several very interesting examples of arguments about topics of topical interest: gun control, eating meat, legalization of drugs. At each stage an argument that initially looked promising, but which housed a more or less subtle fallacy, would be introduced on the slides. Students would be given various clicker options in the diagnosis of the fallacy. And then Zak would open it up for discussion and feedback. Zak deployed both methods for exposing invalidity and it was clear from student participation that the students were taking the main lessons on board and internalizing them.

While Zak uses a textbook for the course the examples were his own and the slides he constructed himself. I thought his slides were very effective indeed. They had just the right amount of information per slide (many instructors, including me, overstuff the slides). The whole session proceeded very smoothly and was a model of clarity.

Some people (not me!) consider logical validity a rather dry subject, one that it is hard to motivate students to be concerned about. But there was no evidence of this in this class.

Apparently effortlessly, Zak kept it lively, interesting and highly interactive. The students were attentive, engaged and eager to participate. Whenever a student had an idea Zak encouraged their contribution, and no matter how inchoate and confused the contribution was, he managed to make it seem apposite. The students were led into constructing arguments and counterexamples together—they were not handed the answers or told what to think.

This class was an exemplary collaborative exploration in both critical and creative thinking. Zak Kopeikin is already a highly accomplished teacher, and I think there is strong evidence that he will become a truly great teacher.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John H. Garvey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "G".

Teaching Observation: Zak Kopeikin

Course: PHILOSOPHY 1440 (Critical Thinking)

September 26, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

On September 24 I observed Zak Kopeikin, a graduate student part-time instructor in our department, teaching a section of PHIL 1440--Critical Thinking. The course is designed to help students learn how to evaluate arguments, with a broad focus on the various means and methods generally used to justify belief. This means the course addresses the known forms of defensible reasoning as well as various kinds of faulty reasoning, and how to detect each. It also covers the uses and misuses of scientific evidence, the basics of symbolic logic, and the skills required to reconstruct arguments from original text before going on to evaluate them. In this particular class, Mr. Kopeikin was reviewing material for a unit that was to be tested the following week. The unit covered inference detection, argument reconstruction, the finding of implicit premises in arguments being reconstructed from original text, the valid and invalid forms of arguments containing conditional expressions, and how to create and use counterexamples as particularly effective means to challenge the validity of an argument, or to challenge the truth of one or more of its premises.

As this summary of what Mr. Kopeikin covered in this short, 50-minute class suggests, Zak is a very efficient guide to what are often rather abstract, hard-to-detect features of arguments and the means, like counterexamples, to challenge them. I was particularly impressed by the way he managed to use a slideshow, with clicker questions peppered throughout, to elicit student responses to issues and questions relevant to elements of the unit being reviewed. Student participation was especially lively and widespread throughout the hour, and this was at least in part due to the way Zak used this well-crafted on-screen presentation. Rather than letting the slideshow do the work, he impressively interacts with what is being projected, and with students, using clicker questions and student responses to make broader points. For example, in a question involving the detection of an invalid argument form he stopped to remind students how to understand the elements of a conditional expression, how the nonconditional premise in the argument related to the parts of the conditional premise, and then used that as a springboard to remind them of invalid and valid conditional argument forms that had been covered both in a previous clicker question, and in previous classes (I assumed).

This is just one of the ways that Zak deftly uses repetition and “circling back” to solidify student understanding. At one point, he reminded students that a clicker question involved an issue already raised in a recently-completed homework. In this regard, he has a particularly excellent sense of how often and where to repeat things already covered within the class session underway, and in the course overall. In another case, while discussing how to produce a counterexample to an invalid form of conditional argument, and before students were asked to offer proposed counterexamples, he reminded them that this particular invalid argument form had been covered in a previous clicker question to make sure they retained the sense of where that form of argument goes wrong. He then used that information to guide them toward a more-effective strategy for generating possible counterexamples to reveal the argument’s invalidity.

I was also impressed with how Zak encourages student participation by regularly soliciting their feedback on particular questions and issues, stopping progress throughout his planned presentation to solicit and/or address student concerns, all without losing the thread of his overall presentation and the primary objectives of the class. These, and the features of his teaching skills mentioned above, are, in my experience, strong indicators of success in maximizing the likelihood that students will retain what they have been taught, and enjoy the process through which their learning develops. To manage this in a course covering rather abstract and remote topics that frequently leave students confused and

uncomprehending is all the more remarkable.

In closing, let me just say that I have observed a number of our teachers, both among our regular department faculty and among our graduate-part-time-instructors, and Mr. Kopeikin shows a rare gift for teaching. I could not recommend him more highly than I do.

Sincerely,

Jason Potter

Instructor

Philosophy Department

Contributions to Diversity

Given the lack of diversity in our field, I consider making philosophy more inclusive a crucially important task. Below I will detail some concrete ways that I attempt to do so. The general guiding principle which informs my approach is that one must be actively engaged with contemporary discussions of how to effectively support diversity and inclusivity. While we must implement concrete interventions to encourage diversity in philosophy and make the field more inclusive of underrepresented groups, I believe we also must recognize that continued learning about different communities' lived experiences and challenges in academia is a crucial aspect of being effective. If we are not listening, then we will miss emerging ideas about how to best serve a diverse student body. Because I believe this, I have participated in numerous workshops about diversity, inclusion, and how to help students facing adversity, continue to do so as Lecturer, and will continue doing so throughout my academic career.

One issue that affects all students but is especially burdensome to first-generation students and students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups is the financial burden of college. While college students in the 1960s and 1970s could afford to pay for college by working during the summer and then ten hours a week during the school year, this is no longer the case. Because of how financially burdensome college is—especially for those without parents who can largely subsidize their education—I endeavor to lessen this burden by avoiding expensive course materials. Most of my courses require no textbooks and rely exclusively on readings that I select and provide through Canvas. I do not require my students to buy clickers. For those courses in which a particular text is especially useful (e.g., a logic class), I aim to limit the total cost to under fifty dollars and supplement it with other free electronic materials. By doing this, my philosophy classes become more accessible to all students, and especially students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who are interested in taking philosophy courses.

When many people think of philosophers, they think of old white men. This can lead to those who are non-white, non-men feeling as though philosophy is not a place for them, which can manifest as stereotype threat and imposter syndrome. I use various tools to fight this impression. One way is by diversifying my syllabi and including written work from diverse philosophers. I include the first names of the authors to highlight and emphasize that philosophy is not only done by old white men. This both more accurately represents that philosophers include diverse persons but also helps motivate the idea that, for any student, philosophy is a place they belong and can succeed.

The metacognition activities that I describe in my Philosophy of Teaching and Learning are also tools for making my classes more inclusive and welcoming to a diverse group of students. Here are a few of the techniques discussed in that section and how they help support inclusion:

Preassessments: A student's past experiences are important to their learning new material. Studies have shown that students connect new information with, and interpret it through, their background beliefs and experiences (Vygotsky 1978; National Research Council 2000). Relating new material to students' prior understanding and experience helps them integrate new material (Kole and Healy 2007). However, it is important to realize that students have had vastly different experiences in life and education before they reach our classes. By using a preassessment activity in which students consider what they already know about the topic and how it might help them guide their learning, students can both privately and publicly reflect on their life and educational experiences and use this to their educational benefit in the course. This allows them to share their prior knowledge and experiences (but *only if they want to*; I make it very clear that nobody is obligated to share). Because they have the option to do so privately, my

preassessments are inclusive towards students who feel uncomfortable with public participation. (As someone who has struggled with depression, generalized anxiety, and panic attacks for most of their life, I know how much of a difference this can make.)

Muddiest Point Assignments: I talk about these in my teaching statement. These assignments allow for a variety of different participation and are designed to encourage self-regulated learning. Students who did not have the privilege of going to fancy, expensive private schools often haven't spent time developing this skill. By emphasizing that confusion is part of learning, this activity destigmatizes and normalizes the experience of being confused. This can especially help first-generation students and students with diverse identities, who may incorrectly feel that failing to grasp something reflects a failing on their part and that philosophy is "too hard" or "not for people like me". Implementing this strategy and making it explicit that confusion is a part of learning helps thwart this. Because these do not require verbal participation—students can participate and have their confusions addressed without needing to vocalize them—this helps include students who may feel uncomfortable speaking due to, e.g., being non-native English speakers, having disabilities such as a general anxiety or panic attack disorder, or feeling imposter syndrome or stereotype threat.

Reducing the stakes of tests: This is a suggestion from Sathy and Hogan's (2019) article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for inclusive course design. I detail my procedure in my teaching statement. This deemphasizes the importance of a one-off performance, which can combat imposter syndrome (feeling as though they do not belong) and stereotype threat (that a bad grade confirms they do not belong), which may lead them to drop the class (Sathy and Hogan 2019).

Give lots of low-stakes assessments: This is also suggested in Sathy and Hogan's (2019) article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for inclusive course design. Using different forms of assessment that take place both inside and outside of class and encouraging metacognition (e.g. by having students ask themselves how they know whether they understand something) emphasizes the importance of resilience in the face of a failure (e.g. a bad grade on an assignment) and can help students "cultivate a sense of hope in the face of a single setback" (Sathy and Hogan 2019). As with reducing the stakes of tests, this may be especially helpful to diverse students who may experience imposter syndrome and face stereotype threat in philosophy classes, due to so many philosophy classes mainly focusing on white male philosophers.

Ultimately, my goal is to make philosophy feel like a place where students from all backgrounds belong. To do so, I realize that I must learn and carefully think of ways that accomplish this goal for students from traditionally underrepresented groups. These are some of the primary concrete things that I do, but I am continuing to learn more about how to make my classes more inclusive and welcoming for all.