Teaching Statement

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In pursuing my PhD at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), I have developed my teaching methods over twelve quarters as a teaching assistant, and two as sole instructor, in a range of philosophical subjects. As sole instructor, I've taught *Introduction to Philosophy* and *Introduction to Ethics* to large (180+) groups of students from diverse backgrounds and majors. As a Teaching Assistant, I've taught small sections of 30 students (two sections per course) in subjects as diverse as *Epistemology, Ethics*, *Critical Thinking*, *Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*, and *Introduction to Philosophy of Science*. Outside the classroom, I've expanded my knowledge and skills by attending a series of teaching workshops that culminate in the *Pillars of Teaching Assistantship* certificate, completing a pedagogy course (*Teaching: From Theory to Practice*), pursuing UCSB's pedagogy certification (*Certificate in College and University Teaching*, or *CCUT*), and co-leading a graduate reading group on diversity and pedagogy.

In my teaching I use activities and assignments that promote active learning and metacognition, engage the students' desire for novelty and play, and promote lively discussion. In addition, I find various ways to solicit feedback so I can make course corrections and make sure my courses are effective for a given student body.

I try to ease the transition many students may have reading works of philosophy for the first time by acquainting them with some general-purpose tools. For instance, I have them read a selection from David Concepcion's "Reading Philosophy with Background and Metacognition" and practice it on our course readings. I've had students for whom this technique instantly clicked (One wrote on a midterm survey, "the "How to Read Philosophy" paper at the beginning really helped, and it continues to be effective to this day"). Though the method is robust and flexible, I have my students start by just focusing on the practice of "flagging" important things in the margin of their text, and then refining the flag (Is it a premise in an argument? An important example? A key term?). My mantra to my students: *Put down your highlighter, pick up your pencil!* This approach fosters active reading and metacognition because it trains students to know *why* they are marking something. Because a pencil allows correction upon re-reading, it also illustrates that there is no such thing as "perfect" understanding of a text. (I sometimes share pages of my notes, which betray countless erasures.)

In my sections, I've assigned reading responses for each piece we cover in lecture, having students bring in their typed or handwritten responses to section for use in discussion. In addition to basic questions like whether they enjoyed the piece and what was the author's thesis, I ask: *What was the oddest or most puzzling thing the author said (or perhaps a puzzling omission)?* This last question was particularly effective in drawing out student discussion. Sometimes the odd thing a student notices will seem trivial, but will lead to important insights. In our discussion of Judith Jarvis Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion," one student commented that it was odd for Thomson to claim she had no right to the cool touch of Henry Fonda's hand. "Who exactly is Henry Fonda and why does Thomson assume every woman is hot over him?" After I explained who he was and the class considered current cinema idols that might inspire such devotion, students started playing with the example in interesting ways. Some students wanted to make it more realistic ("What if I had a very rare illness and only one scientist had the cure?"), but some noticed that the oddness of the example suggested the subjectivity of some human values and what we're willing to call *needs* ("What if Thomson just thought a life without Henry Fonda's

touch *isn't worth living*? Does that make it necessary for her life, and does she thereby have a right to it?"). What's strange grabs attention and engages the mind like clickbait. I'm working on different ways of harnessing this, but sometimes it's best to just ask a straightforward question.

One of my favorite strategies is to turn a potentially stressful learning experience into a game for students, engaging their desire for novelty and play. For instance, I turned our final exam review for upper division ethics into a game of "Jeffpardy." I found a PowerPoint template complete with visuals and sounds from the game *Jeopardy!* and I wrote up review questions and answers. We started section by watching a goofy two-minute YouTube video of a game of *Jeopardy!* in which every contestant's name, as well as every question and answer, was "Jeff." I had the students form teams and compete for first dibs on a bowl of candy (but it was really for the glory). The payoff: an incredibly fun and productive couple of sections, and student comments like "Jeffpardy was one of the most entertaining lesson plans I've ever experienced. It was also very effective."

In section, I've had students use the first session of class to set ground rules for discussion. This takes some work, but it encourages reflection on the practice of discussion, gets the students invested in the rules for class discussions, and helps me know what best helps them learn in the classroom. I write on the board two headings: *What makes for good discussions* and *What makes for poor discussions* and have each student come up and write something after discussing the questions in groups for a few minutes. For example, a common frustration of students is that if one student in the front is always dominating the discussion, the quieter students in back are less likely to get involved and will simply become frustrated and less invested in the class. In one class, we tried out a version of the "three-person rule," the practice of letting three other people contribute after you've made a comment or given an answer. It can be tricky to implement, but it did seem to mitigate the front-row dominator problem. I'm looking forward to trying other strategies to encourage quieter students to participate.

I also solicit feedback by embedding open-ended questions in regular, formative assessments like quizzes, as well as asking feedback questions during lectures (via iClicker) and issuing online surveys. For instance, in future iterations of my online quizzes, I'm building in questions such as: "What was your reaction to your performance on the quiz?" and "What aspect of lecture most helped your comprehension of the material?" This encourages metacognitive reflection on their study processes and their interactions with the lecture course itself. I regularly ask my students what was the "muddiest point" in the preceding lecture and use this as a cue to briefly review that material as well as to (later, privately) reassess and potentially improve my presentation of the material. I also issue midterm surveys to my larger classes, and these have been tremendously helpful. For instance, students overwhelmingly appreciate the "muddiest point" exercise, so it's a keeper (with some tweaking). I've learned that the way I word quiz questions can sometimes be tricky for non-native speakers, so I've developed ways of simplifying my wording that seem to benefit all students. Sometimes a single student's comment can make a permanent difference in my teaching. A student mentioned that my examples use gendered pronouns where it isn't needed, and I realized they were correct: I now omit these or substitute gender-neutral pronouns (except where this would introduce ambiguity).

I look forward to experimenting with new pedagogical techniques as I continue to teach. My love for the subject impels me to not only push my own understanding, but to find better and better ways to encourage my students to do the same.