

Statement of Teaching Philosophy Matt S. Whitt

My teaching fosters intellectual autonomy that will enrich students' scholarship and their civic lives. Primarily, this means helping them discover, refine, and revise their own philosophical commitments, especially as they pertain to pressing ethical and political issues. It also means constructing pedagogical encounters in which students are accountable to others, and not only the instructor, for inspecting, defending, and potentially transforming their views.

I hold students accountable to each other through class discussions, blog posts, and structured peer critiques. However, in my Liberty, Justice, and Imprisonment seminar, the most transformative moments occurred in a workshop with a formerly incarcerated teacher who served sixteen years of a life sentence before he was exonerated. After weeks of *talking about* prisoners in discussions of freedom, punishment, and disenfranchisement, students were now *talking with* a former prisoner. They were now accountable to an interlocutor whose experiences and reflections challenged their presumptions of expertise and intellectual authority. More than any academic text, this conversation made real the ethical and political issues we were studying, and prompted students to deeply scrutinize their own philosophical commitments.

More generally, in courses ranging from Introduction to Philosophy to advanced seminars, my students acquire knowledge and revise their views through collaboration and critical dialogue. This prepares them for the reason-giving and claims-making that are crucial to both academic scholarship and democratic citizenship.

For instance, in my Contemporary Political Philosophy seminar, students initially misunderstood the role of the "original position" and "veil of ignorance" in John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Splitting the class into groups, I had each group closely review select passages, challenging them to teach the basics of Rawls's theory to the rest of the class. When necessary, I answered questions or helped them identify areas of misunderstanding, but mainly I echoed the student-led discussion. By holding students accountable to the confusions of their peers, this exercise pushes them out of passive learning and teaches them to charitably articulate complex views.

In writing-intensive courses, I have come to appreciate how sharing work-in-progress enables students to deepen their thinking. One way to transfer this to larger courses is to require students to publish reading responses on a class blog. This enables them to share their 'first-cut' analyses of assigned material, and experiment with lines of inquiry, before coming to class. Moreover, the online conversation requires students to offer respectful and meaningful criticism of their peers' posts, while defending and revising their own views. Through the blog, I can acknowledge the contributions of individual students and bring their thoughts into lectures and class discussions.

Finally, I use self-assessment memos to hold students accountable to their own standards, and to push those standards higher. In these metacognitive exercises, students come to appreciate their own progress, and they identify potential obstacles and best practices for future learning.

My students have published in undergraduate journals, designed excellent senior capstone projects, and continued their studies at Oxford. But their success also lies in translating their learning for new contexts, as when one student put his feminist philosophy research into practice as the Program Administrator for NYU's LGBTQ Center. Another student transferred insights from our Liberty, Injustice, and Imprisonment seminar to her internship at the White House Office of Presidential Correspondence.

In sum, my teaching is structured around diverse ways of holding students accountable to others and to themselves. This encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning and fosters intellectual autonomy that they will use in advanced scholarship and reflective civic engagement.