

Teaching Statement

In all my classes, I work hard to make the material relevant to my students' lives—whether I'm teaching feminism, bioethics, or existentialism. I know I've succeeded in this aim because every semester, students ask if they can bring friends to my class (and of course I say yes). Furthermore, on my teaching evaluations, students report that they've been inspired to discuss course material outside of class. I've also won awards for my teaching: my course, *Intersectional and Decolonial Feminisms*, won both the Philosophy Department's Martha Lile Love Teaching Award and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Superior Teaching Award. This last was a particular honor given that it was open to graduate students from all disciplines in the arts and sciences.

Often, teaching statements make a number of very general statements about focusing on active learning and other mechanisms for student engagement. I will do something different here by making specific comments about each of the courses I've taught as a solo instructor, as well as my collaboration with two faculty members on a teaching project aimed at improving skills in reading and writing philosophy.

In my Introduction to Existentialism course, most of my students were 18-19 year-olds who were just beginning to become independent from their families—the perfect time to engage with existentialist views. However, texts which once felt incredibly modern and revolutionary risked seeming dusty and didactic now, so I decided I would freshen their relevance by showing how similar themes appear in current pop culture. I paired W.E.B. Dubois' "Of Our Spiritual Striving" and excerpts from Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* with Kendrick Lamar's music video "Alright." When I planned this in-class activity, I'd only intended for students to find lyrics that echoed the reading we'd discussed earlier that day, but each group ended up making connections to theorists we'd discussed weeks—and even months—earlier. In fact, their discussions were so vibrant and detailed that the activity ended up filling the rest of the session: an hour of student-run close reading and debate. Another way I made existentialism feel personal was by having students write weekly reading journals. Students shared their struggles against restrictive parental expectations, bullying, and discrimination, and they connected these personal experiences to the struggles faced by existentialists searching for meaning. Several of my students revealed that they hadn't fully understood the course material until they had the opportunity to think about how it connected to their own experiences.

When I taught Bioethics, I faced a different challenge. Generally speaking, students already care about bioethical debates, but they also come to the course with many unexamined assumptions. During the five semesters I'd previously served as a teaching assistant for Bioethics, I'd always found that the best discussions occurred when students were exposed to perspectives that challenged their ideas about disability and health. I also knew from conversations with MDs I met at a Medical Humanities Conference that many medical schools don't teach doctors to think about the social pressures that their patients face, aside from their mental or physical diagnoses. Consequently, I chose to focus my course on the issue of medical discrimination—with regard to disability, race, gender, and class—and how to provide better care for patients within these marginalized groups. Students reported that the course caused them rethink their assumptions: "Professor McClure's inclusivity and manner of handling such sensitive bioethical issues has made change my perspective on certain things about the world." One student went so far as to recommend: "I feel like everyone should take this course, especially if they plan to be a physician."

Clearly, my courses often include sensitive personal and politically-charged topics, yet my students always talk about how comfortable they feel participating in class discussion. To achieve this, I foster a sense of community by being honest about my own struggles with the topics I'm teaching. For example, both times I taught Feminist Philosophy, I disclosed my status as a sexual assault survivor. I wanted to avoid the all-too-common pattern in philosophical debate of treating survivors as hypothetical problem-cases who can be discussed in an abstract and impersonal way—especially since I knew that some of my students would also be survivors of sexual assault and other traumas. The effects of the disclosure were better than I could have imagined. Students trusted me enough to disclose when something happened to them, and instead of isolating themselves, many students reported that the readings and class discussions helped them heal.

In addition to fostering philosophical discussion, my other teaching passion is for philosophical reading and writing. In 2019-20, I collaborated with U of T Philosophy professor Alex Koo and the English Language Learning Coordinator, Professor Paola Bohórquez, to create a set of skill-building reading and writing activities for use in the discussion sections of large, introductory Philosophy courses. The impetus for the project was that existing materials on philosophical reading and writing tend to be either general lists of advice or time-consuming sets of graded activities unsuitable for use in large classes. We created a series of in-class activities, approximately 20 minutes each, that don't require outside grading time. Moreover, these activities can be incorporated into any topics-based introduction to philosophy. There is no need to change existing course readings, since all the activities are based around a single reading, Nozick's Experience Machine, which is suitable for inclusion in metaphysics, mind, epistemology, or value courses. We tested these activities during the discussion sections of two different introductory courses (ranging from 250-400 students, taught at two separate campuses, with distinct reading lists, and six different discussion section leaders), and saw improvements in student writing, particularly when combined with scaffolded assessments. Equally importantly, these activities received overwhelming student support: when asked whether we should continue using these activities in future versions of the course, 80% answered "yes" and several students called for this kind of training to become mandatory in all introductory courses. Given this success, we applied and were accepted to the American Association of Philosophy Teachers annual workshop, where we will present our skill-building progression to philosophy professors across North America. (Unfortunately, the conference has been postponed, but we'll be part of the rescheduled conference next summer.)

I am proud of the teaching I've done thus far, but also committed to exploring new directions. I continually work to revise and improve the courses I teach; for instance, I decided to focus my award-winning Feminist Philosophy syllabus on Intersectionality and Decolonialism because of student feedback from a previous version of the course in which we'd only covered Black, Latina, and Indigenous feminism in the last few weeks of term. I also love developing new courses. (You can see my planned syllabi for Philosophy and Literature, Philosophy and the Movies, and Introduction to Philosophy on my website, <https://www.emma-mcclure.com/teaching>.) I particularly look forward to developing upper-year courses in areas like Critical Race Theory, Philosophy of Sex and Gender, and Philosophy of Disability. Given my trajectory, I'm confident that I can meet the teaching needs of my next department.