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### **Teaching Philosophy**

The closest that I could come to naming my pedagogical method would be to say that it involves the close reading of texts. Philosophical texts are difficult to understand. I try to show students that they can understand these difficult texts and reap the rewards of doing so. I spend a great deal of time in class reading from the text and discussing with my students the meaning of particular passages. If they can at first understand a text with my help, then they can learn how to do so without my help. That is my goal, to get students to the point where they can read and understand difficult philosophical texts on their own. If they succeed in doing so, then the value of the class extends beyond the semester in which they are taking it. Indeed, my hope is that students will cultivate a life-long love of learning by exercising the strength and keenness of their minds, raising themselves up to the level of these difficult texts, and realizing that they have the capacity to engage themselves fruitfully with complex ideas.

When I say that I want students to understand texts, what I mean is that I want them to be able to interpret particular passages and to relate that interpretation to broader philosophical concerns. An idea is a complex and variegated entity, a whole with many parts. Complete understanding of an idea requires knowledge of both. Plato's dialogue the *Meno* is important in this regard. Although I only teach that text in one of my classes, my PII Ethics course, Socrates' insistence that to be virtuous one must have knowledge of both the whole of virtue (what he calls the form of virtue) and the particular parts (which would include particular virtues such as courage, moderation, and justice) serves as a guide for me in all of my teaching. I encourage my students to see that in order to understand an idea, they need to be able not only to explain the particular parts of that idea but also to situate those particulars into a broader context.

The assessments in my courses follow this pattern. In all of my PII courses, students take exams that require them to identify and interpret passages in terms of parts and wholes. Learning this skill will benefit them no matter what field they pursue. They will need to provide clear explanations of particular ideas and then relate those to broader issues and problems.

An important part of my teaching involves showing students how they can become better readers. In my Ethics course over the past few years, I have taught Mortimer Adler's classic text, *How to Read a Book*. He explains clearly how understanding a book means identifying what the book is about as a whole and being able to explain its major parts and how those parts fit together to form a whole, coherent argument. Although students initially ask themselves why they are reading a book about how to read when they already know how to read, eventually they realize that there are higher levels of reading. Reading is a habit that they can become better at doing. For that class, I designed an assignment requiring students to construct an analytical outline, which focuses on the parts and the whole of a particular text.

I put considerable care into the construction of assignments that would facilitate student learning. Of particular note, I administer quizzes to all of my students in every class every week. The idea of weekly quizzes came from the Logic I class, where that practice is standard. In the spring of 2001, my first year teaching at Nazareth, I decided to adopt this practice in all of my classes. To be sure, grading upwards of 100 quizzes a week puts considerable demands on my time. But the quizzes require students to review their texts and their notes every week, and this leads to lively and informed class discussion. Also, it allows me to determine my students' weaknesses and strengths, not to mention the fact that they appreciate the way it forces them to keep up with what we are doing in class. Many of these quizzes involve the interpretation of passages from the texts, which means in my PII classes, students are writing about the ideas we are discussing on a weekly basis.

All of my upper level classes focus on a leading question, which we return to throughout the course of the semester. In my Ethics course, the question is "What is the best way to live?" In Western Political Philosophy: "How is political theory connected to one's understanding of human nature?" In Contemporary philosophy: "What are the conceptions of the self and language (and their relation) after metaphysics?" In American philosophy: "What is the pragmatic conception of truth?" These leading questions serve as the frame for each course so that students can read texts during the semester with a special emphasis and focus, instead of simply following a history of ideas about a particular topic.

In all of my courses, I emphasize the value not only of reading, as I have already mentioned, but also of speaking and writing. Philosophical ideas need to be spoken out loud. Students need to learn how to articulate their ideas. One of the more important things I have learned as a teacher is that the knowledge students have shows in their ability to speak about what they know. My classes combine lecture, close readings of the text, and class discussion. Many of my students, if not all of them at some point, participate in class discussion.

Reading, speaking, and writing are all similar activities, in that they involve some kind of articulation. Students in my classes must do a great deal of writing, both formal and informal. In my upper level courses, I use Wayne Booth's text, the *Craft of Research*, to show students how to write thesis statements and how to write coherent introductions and conclusions. I have also designed assignments that require students to write about their research and to use that in their critical analyses.

I have come to realize how important it is to teach students basic skills, which they can use to engage the ideas in the texts we are reading in more sophisticated ways. By encouraging thoughtful class discussion, showing students how to become better analytical readers, and designing assignments that require them to write with clarity, precision, and reflection, I believe that my students are advancing in those skills that will help them to appreciate the value of understanding complex, difficult ideas. The

assignments in my classes are designed so that students will achieve these objectives. Above all, I hope that students will learn how to think for themselves and, thereby, reach

their own conclusions. The highest compliment I received once was from a student who said that I made him think. Indeed, it is not necessary for students to agree with my interpretation of a text. I want to show students how they can read and think critically, develop their own questions, use the texts we read to answer those questions, and then articulate their ideas thoughtfully and honestly to others. If students are thinking and making insights through my courses, then I believe that I am being an effective teacher. The foundation for all of my upper level classes is the PI course in Logic and Inquiry. Ideas from this course extend into all of my upper level classes. The one thing I would emphasize about this course and my approach to teaching it is the importance I place on what students say. Many of my students do not realize the power of their own words. They fail to see how important it is for them to choose their words carefully, because what they say commits them, logically, to certain ideas. For that matter, their facility with language will determine what they are able to understand. In this course, I try to show students the kind of force their words can have, both on the thoughts and ideas of others as well as on their own potential for learning.

While assignments, syllabi, texts, and course objectives are essential to student learning, the one thing that students focus on the most is the teacher. Indeed, the best teaching tool I wield is, I believe, my own enthusiasm for philosophy. I am genuinely interested and excited about the ideas we explore in my classes. Many students comment that my own excitement about the material made them more interested in learning it themselves. My favorite, from a student who took two courses from me: “Dr. Campbell, over the past few years you have demonstrated a wonderful blend of professionalism and interest. Your passion for the subject matter is evident even on the grayest of Rochester afternoons...”

Teaching is a vocation I take seriously. It is also one that I love. In all of my courses, I use a guiding question to focus the theme of the course and then show students that they need to address that question through close readings of the texts. In every case, they need to learn how to explain their ideas clearly and then relate them to broader contexts. My own enthusiasm for this kind of activity is, I believe, helping students to gain an appreciation of philosophy and its wealth.