

TEACHING STATEMENT

I have learned a lot from teaching a wide variety of students at UCLA. Because I teach a large introductory course on the philosophy of science (with enrollment between 150 and 300 students), the majority of my students are new to philosophy. Unfortunately, the philosophy of science can seem obscure and impractical to new students, especially when compared to science itself. So, I am constantly experimenting with strategies for bringing abstract questions about the nature of science to bear on more concrete and timely debates. For example, my unit on scientific demarcation is framed as an argument that there is no important sense in which evolutionary theory is a science but creationism is not. And, I illustrate how political forces play a role in determining which scientific theories are accepted and which are rejected by framing a unit around growing skepticism that dinosaur extinction was primarily caused by a meteorite rather than by volcanic activity. Students are sometimes shocked and annoyed to have their preconceptions of science challenged, but, once they have a horse in the race, they engage and they learn. I have been consistently gratified by the level of sophistication my introductory students achieve in both class discussion and in their writing.

I also regularly teach a more advanced course on contemporary philosophy of science (Phil 125), and an advanced course on various topics in metaphysics (Phil 184). Here the challenge is to take students past the introductory level of engaging with general philosophical theorizing to the more advanced level of engaging with specialized scholarly writing. To meet this challenge, I assign readings that introduce big ideas in one fell swoop (rather than readings that make small interventions in entrenched debates). My writing assignments require my students to synthesize more than one reading in some way not previously discussed in class. I occasionally use handouts to supplement more difficult readings, but my general strategy is to encourage students to take their own notes during our discussions while I make notes on the board to highlight the most important points. A sign that class has gone well is that I've worked up a sweat documenting some debate my students are having about the day's assigned reading.

Recently, teaching has been complicated by the pandemic. For both Phil 125 and Phil 184, I employed a flipped classroom technique, and turned my usual lectures into recorded online videos, which I supplemented with hand-drawn slides, stop-motion animation, and (short!) theme songs. I reserved my scheduled lecture time for Zoom discussions of the week's reading and accompanying videos. Finally, I used Discord (an online messaging platform) to facilitate real-time conversations between students, and to offer an alternative way of interacting with me for students who preferred not to use Zoom.

I continue to look for ways to expand and diversify my teaching portfolio. For example, my research interests in social sciences and social ontology have inspired me to design a new course for advanced undergraduates, *Metaphysics of Science for a Social World*, in which I pair recent work in philosophy of gender, philosophy of race, philosophy of disability, and social ontology with classic readings in the philosophy of science. The goal is to examine whether features of the study of social kinds and dynamics, which might have seemed unique to "soft sciences", have analogues in features of the study of physical kinds and dynamics, including chemistry and physics. We will also discuss readings that challenge core assumptions common to analytic philosophy of science and analytic studies of the social world. I'm very excited to offer this course for the first time in Winter 2022.

Every year I teach a graduate seminar on some topic in the philosophy of science (Phil 232). To maximize my value as a graduate teacher, I have tried to balance offering seminars on specialized areas of my research with offering seminars on topics that are likely to be of use across a wide range of specializations. So, though I have offered specialized courses on chance, time travel, and indeterministic explanation, I have also offered more general courses on scientific explanation,

natural kinds, and inference to the best explanation. My aim is to make sure that each of our graduate students has the opportunity to dig into a particular topic on which I am an expert but also to bring quite general insights from the philosophy of science to bear on their own research areas.

I have also experimented with new modes of graduate teaching. For example, I joined David Kaplan in co-teaching our department's seminar for first-year graduate students. The topic for the course was the philosophy of language—a topic on which David is one of the world's leading experts and I am a novice—and many of the readings were new to me. It was enormously fun and fruitful to model the role of question asker (rather than question answerer), and I learned a great deal from our students as well as from David. The strategy of modeling philosophy by discussing papers with which I am otherwise unfamiliar seemed frightening at first, but it went so well that I have incorporated it, in small doses, at all levels of my teaching.

Graduate teaching during the pandemic was also instructive. To encourage more active engagement over Zoom, I required each graduate student to give a short (i.e., 5-8 minute) presentation on some aspect of each week's topic. Furthermore, and for the first time in my graduate teaching, I created slides to accompany my own weekly presentations. These two innovations worked surprisingly well, and I will be incorporating each into my graduate teaching even after the pandemic.