

Diversity Statement

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Three important activities characterize my efforts in fostering diversity: first, my work for the Iowa Lyceum; second, my experience engaging students both at large research universities and at a community college; third, my research and teaching efforts. I am a first-generation college student.

My main accomplishment in promoting diversity stems from my role in the Iowa Lyceum. I co-founded the Iowa Lyceum in 2013 and I have directed it ever since. The Iowa Lyceum is a one-week-long summer program that introduces interested high-school age students to philosophy. There are a few ways in which the Lyceum promotes diversity.

First, the program is free to students, so individuals from financially disadvantaged backgrounds are able to participate.

Second, there has been a lot of discussion in philosophical circles about racial and gender imbalance in philosophy and ways to help make philosophy more accessible for all. One hypothesis that has gained traction in recent years is that prior to taking a first philosophy course, members of underrepresented groups report being less interested in the course and less likely to anticipate succeeding in the course than members of historically well-represented groups do. The Lyceum offers an opportunity to remedy this by introducing members of historically underrepresented groups to philosophy earlier, when they are still in a highly formative stage and have not yet narrowed their view of their academic prospects as much as college undergraduates have. I have actively sought to make sure our program's participants represent a diverse group. In one recruitment effort, I gave a presentation about the Lyceum to a group of mostly Latino and Black junior high school students enrolled in a program that provides them with resources to encourage them to finish school. I have also used a diverse group of instructors for the Lyceum. Our participants learn a wide variety of perspectives from men and women of color. All of these efforts have been successful in promoting diversity.

Third, the Lyceum promotes not only gender and racial diversity, but intellectual diversity. I structure the program so that students will be introduced to many areas of philosophy and learn to appreciate a variety of perspectives on different topics. I strongly believe that teaching philosophy in this way promotes a kind of open-mindedness that is too often lacking in society. Indirectly, this kind of intellectual diversity promotes other kinds of equality by encouraging the practice of taking others' perspectives and histories seriously.

I have also taught several philosophy courses at University of Iowa, University of Idaho, and at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Having students with very different backgrounds has significantly improved my abilities as a teacher. My students range from upper-class and white to non-white, international, nontraditional, gender nonconforming, and financially disadvantaged. While I was already sensitive to 'outsider' feelings as a first-generation college student myself, I believe having those students in class has made me a better teacher by making me even more aware of the different perspectives students bring to the classroom and how, in return, to teach in a way that is accessible to many different types of

learners with many different types of experiences. I improved my ability to present material in a way that does not assume a homogenous conception of 'normal.' I also learned to offer more opportunities for discussions and assignments that allow students to synthesize the material in my course with their other experiences.

Some of my experience teaching philosophy for Kirkwood Community College was through the department of distance learning. I taught web-only online classes, a multi-location teleconference course, and a hybrid course (partly online, partly in-person). That experience challenged me even more to learn new ways to make philosophy accessible.

In my teaching and research, I strive to make use of materials created by members of underrepresented groups. In my courses, I use texts written by members of underrepresented groups whenever possible while still giving students a suitable background in 'the canon'. In my research, I attempt to do something very similar. Where I cite an argument by (say) a famous male philosopher and there exists an important critique of that argument by (say) a woman philosopher, I cite the latter work as well. I think such efforts play an important role of making my field accessible and fair for all.

Similarly, my research promotes intellectual diversity. I defend some positions that are very controversial and others that are generally rejected. But I follow the argument where it leads, and I hope the perspective and intellectual honesty I bring encourages the kind of open-mindedness I wrote about earlier.

In the future, I plan to continue these efforts. I will continue using fairly-balanced course materials and research practices and modeling open-mindedness. I will also continue to make my courses relatable to anyone who is interested enough to take them. As a new professor, I look forward to helping create an inclusive environment by mentoring any interested students. I also hope to continue doing outreach of the sort I started with the Iowa Lyceum within two years of beginning a permanent position. One plan I have for a future Lyceum is to further diversify the instructors. A way I hope to do this is to involve active undergraduate students as instructors. That will provide those student-instructors with valuable teaching skills and will further serve to promote diversity in philosophy.