TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My teaching focuses on three student-centered goals. I work to develop the students' philosophical sense of the issues under discussion, to enable students to logically organize complex arguments, and to improve students' writing abilities.

My teaching is energetic, and I'm really comfortable with allowing discussions to go to sidebar issues because I know I can bring the class back to the main thread. One tactic is to appoint a timekeeper who tells me when there are ten minutes remaining. That gives me time to pull the main philosophical issues together even if the discussion has been less-than-linear. It also allows me to orchestrate a short writing to end class which serves as a springboard to the next class discussion.

I regularly break students into 2's and 3's for discussion and reporting back—Pair & Shares. In discussing sexual ethics, for example, I have them discuss the goods of sex, and we generate a list of 30–50 positive aspects of sex. It's a wild class that helps to break down some barriers to later discussions. We use that list throughout the section on sexual morality and marriage, and I think they are far more comfortable if the examples come from them rather than from their professor. Pair & Shares encourage them to value the diversity they find among their peers and help them to tap into a group-level of creativity that is important as they go forward.

I often give students practice in writing on topics whose discussion is fresh. At the end of classes with especially difficult concepts, I have students write on one main point from the lecture. After having discussed Thomson's violinist example, for instance, they write for five minutes at the end of class. These writings focus students' attention on the dialectical structure of the argument.

Each course emphasizes the specifics of good philosophical writing. It is valuable for students to give each other feedback, so I schedule at least two activities around peer reviewing each other's writing. As a prelude to peer feedback, we discuss a student paper from the internet or a previous semester (not one of theirs); our concern is to develop feedback strategies that will help the writer. The ultimate goal is for them to be more reflective about their writing, to get them to be their own best editors.

Except in logic classes, my assessment of student progress includes at least one essay on each exam. In addition, there are a number of low-stakes assignments to prepare them to do well on the more significant portions of their grades.

PHILOSOPHY · MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY · SPRINGFIELD, MO 64897
✉ PATRICKBEACH@MISSOURISTATE.EDU ☎ (208)870-5240
HTTP://WWW.PATRICKBEACH.ORG