

Sandmeyer – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

I include this statement in every syllabus: "As faculty within the University of Kentucky, we in the Department of Philosophy are committed to our core values of diversity and inclusion, mutual respect and human dignity, and a sense of community (Governing Regulations XIV). We acknowledge and respect the seen and unseen diverse identities and experiences of all members of the university community (<https://www.uky.edu/regs/gr14>). These identities include but are not limited to those based on race, ethnicity, gender identity and expressions, ideas and perspectives, religious and cultural beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ability, and socioeconomic status. We are committed to equity and justice and providing a learning and engaging community in which every member is engaged, heard, and valued." In this document I will explain how I realize this ideal in the classroom.

Principles of Universal Design

All of my classes are constructed according to the seven principles of universal design (see universaldesign.ie). Some of these principles are not necessarily apparent to the student/user, but most are explicit and easily recognizable features of my course. According to the first principle of equitable use, I provide identical, or when that is not possible, equivalent means of use to all students. See my Teaching Portfolio, especially the PHI100 and PHI205 packets, where I have discussed in detail course mechanics. I build my courses in Canvas explicitly around maximal accessibility. Not only do I write all my own HTML code to ensure the pages are readable in multiple formats, but also I use the accessibility checker embedded in that software to confirm there are as few gaps as possible. Additionally, in the first weeks of the semester I have explicit lessons on the accessibility options available to students using Canvas. The principle of flexible use entails that differences in student abilities and learning styles are consciously accommodated in the build of my class assignments. For instance, students may decide how to complete a discussion forum assignment, e.g., by writing text, by recording a video, recording audio, or another means. My course design is marked by the principle of simple and intuitive use. Not only do I write the code to accommodate multiple different readers, but there is a simple and uniform style characteristic to the pages I create. Indeed, there are typically really only three pages with which students work: the front page, the daily lesson, and the lesson page, itself. All these pages have an identical header, and they all intuitively linked together. Information is presented consistently from beginning to end. Furthermore, I construct my lessons according to the principle of perceptible information. Lesson content is available in multiple redundant formats, typically presented both verbally and in written format. I employ heavy use of images that supplement these presentational modalities. That is to say, lessons are designed to address a diversity of sensory and processing abilities. Especially important in light of the pandemic, my classes are designed with a high tolerance for error. I arrange the physical classroom, itself, to be efficient for low physical effort, especially for those whose needs require accommodation. Indeed, the scale of the classroom is an important consideration, as I teach many large classes. Hence, I ensure that size and space for approach and use are integral components of the class experience.

Inclusive Teaching

In all my classes I endeavor to implement the following these principles of inclusive teaching into the course. First, and perhaps most importantly, I establish a course climate that fosters a sense of belonging for all students in the class. As I discuss in my Teaching Statement, all my classes are built around the ideal of the learning community. Hence, I form students into groups, in which they remain the entire semester. Essential to this task is the work I ask them to complete together in

these groups in the classroom. The first task is for students to get to know one another. They accomplish this by pairing together, introducing themselves to each other, and discussing their interests. Once this is complete, the partner introduces her peer to the larger group. My instruction to the groups is essential at this stage, I believe. The aim of this exercise is not to introduce the other but more so to identify something about the other that inspires. Students come to recognize their peers as fully developed adults having inherent worth and an identity that deserves respect. Every classroom interaction and group assignment, whether in-class or online, revolves around the principle of respect for inherent dignity of the other. Of course, this desiderata demands my constant attention to the dynamics of the group interactions, and this often includes avenues of anonymous feedback to the class instructor.

In addition to the careful shaping of the classroom climate, I design the course content to recognize diversity and barriers to inclusion. This can be most clearly seen in my PHI336 Environmental Ethics class. We read Aldo Leopold's very famous essay "The Land Ethic." After this, we consider the articulation of this ethics from the standpoint of traditionally excluded peoples. For instance, we read Lauret Savoy's "Alien Land Ethic" directly after reading Leopold. Here she notes that she, an African American woman with Indigenous roots, does not see her own history included in Leopold's natural history of the land community. We move from there to read Drew Lanham, a black ornithologist. We discuss the racially charged confrontation between a white woman in New York city's Central Park and a black amateur bird watcher. So, we discuss that the extension of the land ethic to include plants and animals is often mute regarding the exclusion of certain peoples in our social history. This recognition marks not a moment in the class but rather a transition to consider environmentalism from a radically other perspective. Students take an implicit bias test. We do not discuss the results of these tests in class. But the class, indeed all my classes, are designed to maximize self awareness and a commitment to inclusion. In my Food Ethics class, for instance, students come to recognize that food insecurity isn't simply a poverty issue. Rather, we study how food systems, themselves, bear the marks of exclusion in the very demographics of food production and distribution.

Modelling Attitudes and Behavior

There is a story I tell in almost all my classes. It is a fictional story about an encounter that I have with a student. In the story, I explain that for some reason he and I take an immediate dislike to one another. That is, this dislike manifests itself without provocation. We have all experienced this, I point out. We meet someone, the hairs stick up on our necks, and there's perhaps even a little feeling of antipathy. It is inexplicable most times. The point of the story, I explain, is the meaning of respect. As persons standing before one another, we have a duty to respect the inherent worth of the other. My duty to my students, in other words, does not arise nor is it not rooted in my feelings for (or against) that student. Rather, the student is a person having inherent worth, and I will act in a way that respects this worth.

So, I tell them. If I like you, I will respect you. But even if I might not be inclined toward you, I will respect you equally. Respect is a moral attitude, not a psychological emotion. It is an attitude, I explain, that defines our interactions together in this classroom. Throughout the semester, I rigorously maintain this attitude and explicitly ask my students to do the same. Together, we model this moral attitude of respect for the intrinsic value of the other. Difference of race, gender, economic station, etc. may impact our interactions together, but they ought never subvert this attitude.