TEACHING STATEMENT
Erin Beeghly

I was not a typical undergraduate. I attended more educational institutions than a person can count on one hand: a technical school for the jewelry industry, a small liberal arts college for women only, a community college, an extension college, a public university, and a college for "mature-students" at one of the oldest universities in England. Throughout all of this, somehow, I found philosophy. That it stuck is thanks in large part to my teachers. My family never pushed. Neither my father nor mother ever went to college. "You don't need college to be successful," my father warned me as I left home at eighteen, "it will put you into debt, and a college degree is pretty much useless these days. You need a skill to fall back on."

Skills. My father was a dairy farmer; now he is a jeweler. I am a professional philosopher. Despite our differences, we share a strong practical impulse. My job, as I see it, is to help students develop skills that will be valuable in any profession and in life generally: the ability to write and think clearly, to make a strong argument, to listen to other people whose opinions differ from their own, and to create dialogue.

Accordingly, I work hard to make sure that students learn philosophical methodology. The core method is simple. Articulate a view, evaluate it, and conclude. I make this structure clear to students and encourage them to break down philosophical arguments into simple, manageable parts. We do close readings. We define terms together and sketch arguments in premise-premise-conclusion form. We examine the role of thought-experiments and examples in arguments. All this enables students to better understand the content of arguments, as well to make their own.

Accessibility. Especially for students who have not studied philosophy in high school, the subject matter can be intimidating. I therefore try to make philosophy approachable. Using small group work and in-class debates, I encourage a collaborative, student-directed atmosphere, even in large lecture courses. I make sure that everyone, even the least talkative pupil, has a chance to contribute. I am also frank about how hard philosophy was for me. As a beginning student, I struggled a great deal. While I loved philosophy, I wasn't initially very good at it. I tell students this, and I encourage them to keep trying. In many of my classes, we also do in-class reading and writing "boot camps" with the aim of bringing everyone up to speed.

Interdisciplinarity. I also make my courses accessible through interdisciplinarity. I readily use non-philosophical texts in the classroom, including fiction, legal cases, news articles, autobiography, and interviews. When we learn about workplace discrimination, for example, we read articles on the psychology of discriminators. We also read first hand accounts from people who lost jobs due to discrimination. I myself was originally trained to read history, philosophy, fiction, and science together, and I try to recreate that experience, in some small way, in my philosophy classroom. This approach, moreover, helps to keep my curriculum inclusive, allowing me to incorporate many more writers of color and women than is typical in philosophy courses.

Mentoring. I aim to be a supportive advisor to my undergraduate and graduate students, both those who intend to continue in academia and those who do not. My favorite advisors are able to think creatively and constructively with me, as well as offer helpful professional advice, and I strive to be this kind of advisor as well. I especially aim to mentor students from underrepresented groups and first-generation college students, like myself.