

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Over the past six years, I have been committed to two diversity-related goals: making philosophical ideas and skills accessible to as many young people as I can, and supporting young people from marginalized groups who show interest in philosophy but are unduly wary of pursuing a career in the discipline. These goals were born out of my own educational experiences, and have been borne out in the two years before graduate school that I spent teaching in a secondary school in a diverse and economically deprived part of London, as well as the four years (and counting!) that I have spent as Outreach Coordinator in the Michigan Philosophy Department, and the work that I have done as a graduate assistant for the Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute. The Michigan Philosophy Department honored this work in October 2017 by awarding me the Department's inaugural "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Prize". I am motivated in all of this work by the conviction that philosophy is not the exclusive preserve of social elites.

This conviction stems from my personal history. I attended some of the most poorly-performing schools in my home town of Nottingham (UK), but I fell in love with philosophy after discovering an introductory book at my local library. I benefited from the fortune of having parents who encouraged my ambition to go to university to study philosophy, which helped me to maintain this ambition despite environmental setbacks – like the careers advisor who told me that I should consider a vocational course in hairdressing as a realistic alternative. At 16 I enrolled at a sixth-form college (the British equivalent of high school) that offered philosophy classes, was anonymously referred for its Oxbridge application program, and got in to Cambridge. I attained the highest results in the year in all three years of my degree, and slowly came to realize that cultural capital is not required in order to be a good philosopher; a critical mind and a strong work ethic can be enough. But I also learned that cultural capital *helps*. At Cambridge I was confused and intimidated by the complex implicit rules of the British class system (especially as it interacted with gender hierarchies), struggled extensively with impostor syndrome, and did not speak in lectures or discussions throughout the entirety of my undergraduate degree. I was also struck by the vast differences both in self-assurance and in job prospects between my friends from home and my new friends from university.

My reflections on these experiences led me to decide to spend some time teaching in a school similar to the one I had attended, sneaking critical thinking skills and philosophical issues into the curriculum as much as I possibly could, and raising the aspirations of teenagers who fail to recognize the extent of their own talent. I joined the UK's Teach First program (similar to Teach for America) and spent two years working full-time as a teacher of Citizenship and Religious Studies in Croydon – one of the most socio-economically deprived parts of greater London. My Citizenship classes were largely social and political philosophy; my Religious Studies classes were a mix of metaphysics and ethics. The experiences that I had over these two years served to solidify the two goals with which I began this statement. They also solidified my belief in the transformative power of engagement with philosophical ideas; I had already seen this in myself to some extent, but this conviction was reinforced every day by the impact that I saw my classes having on my students – not only on their grades, but also on their ambitions, acuity, and self-esteem.

As a Teach First teacher I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to provide young people with some of the support that would have benefited me and my old schoolfriends. I arranged a trip to the UK's Houses of Parliament for a group of 13-year-olds, and a trip to my old Cambridge college for a group of 17-year-olds thinking about university. I edited CVs. I invited our local MP into the school to meet with year 8 students who were working on a project related to the UN's Millennium Development Goals, and helped to arrange an internship with him for one of my brightest students. I organized countless debates, and developed structured writing advice to help my students to produce clear and well-organized argumentative essays.

I worked extensively with a group of students who were refugees, and were learning English from scratch while studying for their national exams. I helped one Afghani refugee to become a school prefect.

This approach continues to inform my teaching at Michigan. It is vital to me that my teaching enables *all* students to engage with course material and meet the course objectives, regardless of their background. In my classes, I continue to introduce materials and activities that explicitly teach the skills of critical analysis and argumentation – skills that are crucial for doing good philosophy, but that, without explicit teaching and practice time, tend to correlate with social privilege. I produce resources and conduct lesson activities aimed at making arcane texts accessible to all students. And I employ assessment techniques that I learned as a secondary school teacher to regularly check student progress: I encourage students to self- and peer-assess their work, and in some classes I offer one-on-one feedback meetings to privately discuss students' work and set personal goals. I have also worked with students facing destabilizing personal circumstances to develop personal learning plans to help them get back on track.

When I arrived at Michigan for my PhD, I wanted to continue to widen access to the discipline to members of historically under-represented groups. This led me to co-found the Michigan High School Ethics Bowl. The Bowl is an outreach program in which graduate students teach ethical and political theory to local high schoolers, and then facilitate critical discussion of a series of case studies, written by members of the local community, about moral and political issues affecting Michigan and/or the wider world. We also organize three annual events: a “kick-off” event in which students from different schools work collaboratively on a case, a tournament in which teams of students debate the cases, and a conference, held at Michigan in the Spring, in which all the speakers are local high school students. My main goal for the Bowl is to expand access to the skills involved in philosophical reasoning to schools with limited resources – like the ones that I went to, and the one that I taught at – who would not otherwise have similar opportunities. To this end, in my second year I secured an \$8,000 grant to expand the Bowl into schools in Detroit. This has gone well; in 2017, a Detroit school won our tournament and traveled to North Carolina to compete in the National High School Ethics Bowl. I also enjoy the mentoring opportunities that outreach work provides. I am still in touch with several former participants, some of whom have chosen to major or minor in Philosophy (two at Michigan!) as a result of their positive experiences with the Ethics Bowl program.

It was because I enjoy providing mentoring and support that I chose to participate in the Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute (PIKSI), a program dedicated to helping undergraduates from historically underrepresented groups to see that they have a place in the field of Philosophy. I was a Graduate Student Assistant at the PIKSI Rock 2016 workshop. This gave me the chance to mentor four students, offering in-depth writing advice, career advice, and motivational support. I loved this role. I keep in touch with my mentees, and I enjoy continuing to help them to navigate academia – from assisting with applications to graduate school, to meeting up and discussing plans when I can, to arranging last-minute accommodation in London for a mentee who had secured a place on a Summer program at Oxford but had not made a plan for how to get there. Participating in PIKSI also shaped the way that I think about diversity in Philosophy. This was my first time in a room full of people who are all strongly committed to diversifying the discipline, and I learned an enormous amount from the other mentors, speakers, and students about methods for diversifying the canon and practicing inclusive pedagogy. I am extremely grateful for this experience, and I plan to actively seek out similar opportunities in future.

I hope that, in the rest of my career, I can continue to widen access to philosophical ideas and skills and to support talented-but-underconfident young people to pursue their interest in philosophy. I would be thrilled to work with promising undergraduates who are as enthused about the subject as I am, but who do not see themselves as “cut out” for a career in academia – just as I didn’t, when I got started.