

PHIL 239: Teaching Methods in Philosophy
Seminar Syllabus
09/20/2021 - 12/03/2021

Instructor: John Wilcox

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Time: Fri 12:15 PM - 1:15 PM

Room: [200-107](#)

Anonymous Feedback Form: <https://forms.gle/wneJ2g63TE83Vipg7>

Aim:

The purpose of this seminar is to facilitate the development of specific motivations and skills that conduce to effective teaching in philosophy. The selection of topics is flexible and largely dependent on what the seminar participants themselves would themselves find most useful.

Participants will of course have their own experiences and insights about teaching, at least as students who have experienced a variety of teaching styles—if not also as teachers themselves. For that reason, this seminar is best seen as a space for the sharing of insights, guided by a seminar facilitator.

Evaluation & Assignments:

There is no evaluation component to this seminar, nor are there any assignments in the ordinary sense of that term. That said, seminar participants will be expected to do some independent research and to give a 6-minute presentation on some topic which they would find useful in their teaching, along with 4 minutes for discussion or Q&A. Examples of topics include, but are not limited to, the following: how to avoid the pitfalls of unconscious competence, techniques to reduce teaching anxiety, and ways to encourage participation from underrepresented demographic groups in philosophy. These presentations will occur in the 8th and 9th weeks of the seminar, as indicated below.

Topic Outline:

What follows is a tentative topic outline for the various weeks.

1. **September 24th:** Introduction and an exploration of the motivation to teach

This week, section participants will be encouraged to share 1) information about themselves (name, current course of study and preferred gender pronouns), 2) what experience, if any, we have had teaching, 3) what motivates us to teach, 4) what apprehensions we have about teaching and 5) what we would like to explore in this seminar. We will also consider what the possible motivations are to teach. We will reflect on the following questions:

1. Which of your previous teachers were especially helpful or good? What made them this way?
2. Which of your previous teachers were *not* especially helpful or good? What made them this way?
3. How did these two kinds of teachers impact us and our learning in different ways?
4. Which kind of teacher do we want to be more like in our own teaching?

Participants will also go through the seminar outline to suggest any modifications to the proposed set of topics.

2. **October 1st:** The purpose of sections and teaching assistants (TAs), and how to plan a section (CTL course on backwards planning)

We will explore the different purposes of sections and TAs, as well as how to effectively plan sections. We will reflect on the following questions:

1. What are the purposes of section?
2. What are the purposes of TAs?
3. How can we effectively plan a section?

Participants will also be encouraged to think of topics for their presentations later in the quarter.

3. **October 8th:** Methods of enhancing participation and discussion

We will explore the different ways to enhance participation in sections and lectures. We will reflect on the following questions:

1. What are different strategies to enhance participation or discussion?
2. What experiences have you had with the so-called “think, pair and share” technique, either as a student or a teacher?
3. What experiences have you had with so-called “cold calling”, either as a student or a teacher?

4. **October 15th:** Tips for effective grading

We will discuss how to effectively grade papers. Participants will be asked to reflect on the following question: which tips have you previously found useful in grading papers?

5. **October 22nd:** [No Seminar – John is travelling for a conference of sorts]

6. **October 29th:** Psychological biases and dispositions in the classroom and survey methodology

We will discuss some psychological biases and dispositions, as well as how they can influence dynamics in the classroom. Examples include: the curse of knowledge, unconscious competence, imposter syndrome,

perfectionism and others. To encourage the use of survey methodology, participants will also be encouraged to set up surveys to gather feedback on their presentations.

7. **November 5th**: Strategies to support student mental health

We will explore some strategies to support the mental health of our students including: survey methodology, allowing for free late days in the syllabus, providing references to campus resources to support mental health, and acknowledging the need to be sensitive to mental health and life stresses in our courses.

8. **November 12th**: Presentations and discussion

9. **November 19th**: Presentations and discussion

Thanksgiving Recess

10. **December 3rd**: Content to be determined based on the interests of seminar participants