

# Teaching Statement

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I am grateful that through teaching I have the opportunity to make a contribution to the lives of people around me, even if just a small one. I regularly update my pedagogical approach to improve outcomes for students in measurable ways. I've also developed new courses and programs (both in my work as Director of Undergraduate Studies and outside of it), and am regularly involved in pedagogical enrichment workshops and groups.

## Pedagogical Activities Outside The Classroom

I am committed to continuously improving as a teacher and as a mentor. I completed a year-long pedagogy course through the Center for Excellence in Teaching, as well as their 6-week follow-up on online teaching, I am a member of the Philosophy as a Way of Life pedagogy network, and am currently participating in a 3-year series of pedagogy workshops at the University of Notre Dame. I am also dedicated to providing mentorship on pedagogy, and am the teaching mentor for 7 graduate students in our program (as well as 4 students who have now graduated).

I also care about continuing to create innovative courses, and recently received a \$20,000 grant (with Michael Hall in Mathematics) to develop a 300-level course, *Infinity in Mathematics and Philosophy*. I have developed several other courses for USC as well, including the 100-level *Ancient Foundations of Western Thought*, the 100-level *The Physical World and Our Place In It*, and the 100-level *Introduction to Philosophy of Religion*. Most recently, I developed a 200-level *Conceptual Foundations of Conflict* course, and intend to teach it with a focus on the philosophy of abuse (which is also an emerging research interest of mine). I also regularly rework courses I've taught before; for instance, teaching 300-level *Metaphysics and Epistemology* with a new focus on topics in social metaphysics. And Mark Schroeder and I collaborated to rework our department's graduate-level teaching instruction, which is now split into 2 seminars (one for 2<sup>nd</sup> year grad students, and a second for 4<sup>th</sup> years) and which I most recently taught in fall of 2021.

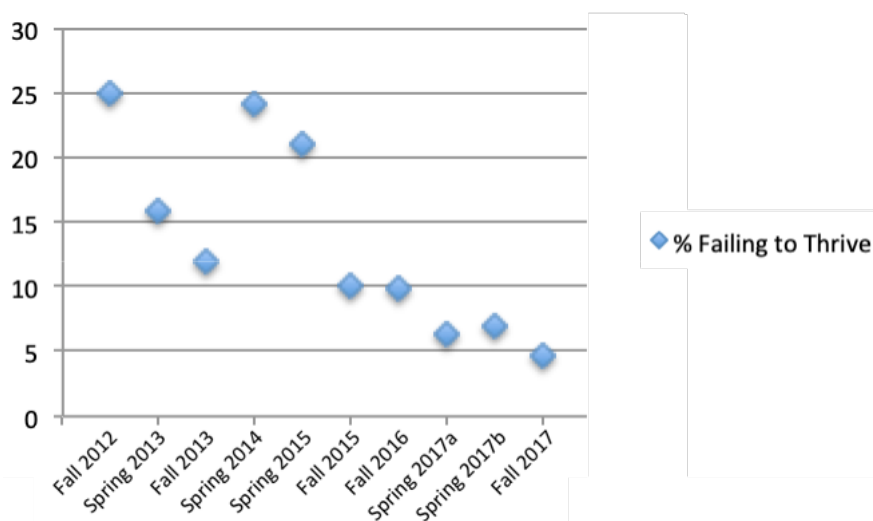
I am also passionate about developing exciting departmental programs for undergraduates. As Director of Undergraduate Studies, in 2019 I initiated and oversaw the development of a new departmental Honors program. I am also in the process of developing an interdisciplinary Math and Philosophy minor.

## Pedagogy Inside The Classroom: Data

I regularly teach undergraduate-level Metaphysics, Ancient Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, and topical introductions to Philosophy (which include Ethics and Epistemology). At the graduate level I have taught seminars on Metaphysics and on Pedagogy. At USC I have taught courses to freshmen, to graduate students, and at every level in between. Class size has ranged from under 10 students to over 150. It has been a steady learning experience for me.

Regardless of the course, I care about making my students' experience in my classroom worthwhile. I attempt to provide smoothly-delivered lectures supplemented with interactive handouts, regular in-class activities, and innovative assignments. I'll go into more detail about these things, but first let me note some evidence I have that this strategy is working.

When I first arrived at USC I simply lectured (with in-class discussion), and gave exams. I prepared my lectures meticulously, but did not think about how to teach using a range of modalities to maintain student interest and engagement, nor how to connect content with students' everyday lives. Instead, I taught to the kind of student I had been. I had large numbers of students failing to thrive in my classes: receiving Ds or Fs, or withdrawing or taking the class P/F and not passing. Between fall 2012 and spring 2015, I taught large lecture courses 5 times and had 20-25% of my students fail to thrive in 3 of those classes. In the summer of 2015 I made a change: I began reworking my lectures to make them more accessible, I made interactive handouts, and I developed in-class activities. And there was an immediate change. Since then I've taught large lecture courses 5 more times, with never more than 10% of my students failing to thrive. By fall of 2017, that number was down to 4.6%. There are other things that matter, of course, and other variables in this interval, but it is some evidence that my changes were helpful.



### **Pedagogy Inside The Classroom: Approach**

To facilitate organized, content-rich lectures, I write out each lecture in preparation, and I read the draft within 24 hours of teaching so I have in mind exactly what I want to say and am able to improvise on that basis. Then, after lecturing, I edit my notes in light of what was effective and what wasn't. This allows me to avoid needless in-class delays as I attempt to determine precise yet understandable ways of communicating the material. It also cuts down significantly on time required for course preparation when teaching courses I've taught before.

To help students stay alert and involved, I frequently ask unthreatening short-answer questions, regularly stop for more involved discussion, and use interactive handouts for every undergraduate lecture. I also use a variety of targeted, in-class activities. For instance, when covering Epistemology, I give examples of Gettier Cases, list and explain the features any Gettier Case must have, then have students develop their own examples. Any students interested may then present their examples to the class. Students walk away with a personal connection to the material, a better understanding of the key components of these kinds of cases, and some strikingly amusing examples from fellow students.

I've also attempted to develop innovative out-of-class assignments. For instance, in my 300-level Metaphysics course, to give the students a new way of thinking about the variety of metaphysical claims, and to show how some things they take for granted depend on them, I have them write short stories. They choose a metaphysical law, and write a short story predicated upon that law being false, exploring the implications of that.

Finally, supplementing their interacting with me in class, I encourage students to come to my office hours. And because even with this encouragement students often don't come to office hours as much as they should, I go where the students are: I arrive fifteen to twenty minutes before each class meeting, and simply talk with students in the hallway. I also chat with students online in pre-exam review sessions.

### **Graduate-Level Teaching**

Working to create environments where every student can thrive is a central goal in my graduate-level teaching as well. One of the central difficulties faced by graduate students is the paralysis that can come with anxiety over the process of producing philosophy (which can be scary, when there is an unpredictable creative component and when writing and publication skills are being developed). Thus, just as with my undergraduate classes, I work to make my assignments accessible and as low-stress as possible. Clarity and detail about expectations is crucial for students at every level and from every background. And I believe that everyone benefits from assistance with breaking large assignments (such as a 500-level seminar paper) into small components (initial argument, outline, section drafts, final draft) that they turn in and receive feedback on throughout the semester. So instead of giving graduate students one final assignment at the end of the term, I give them a long line of small assignments that ultimately lead to production of a final paper with significant feedback from me and from their peers. I also advise those dissertating to take a similar, gradual approach: rather than approaching, say, choosing a dissertation as a single, large decision, I recommend that they read a bit every day and write a page every day for 3-6 months, and then see which interests and arguments naturally arise from their reading and writing. I believe that this process offers a steady and stress-free way to produce a lot of work that naturally begins to cluster together into larger projects. In seminars and in dissertating, I believe in turning departments into places where every student has every chance to succeed.

### **Final Notes**

In addition to the above, I work to support a thriving philosophical community for Philosophy undergraduates and graduate students. I have organized reading groups, summer work groups, hikes, picnics, art-walks, pumpkin carving, laser tag, and a series of dinners with faculty for undergraduates. I care very much about cultivating an interest in philosophical reflection both inside and outside the classroom.

I invite you to find more information, including syllabi, course websites, evaluations, and video samples of my teaching here: <http://www.parthood.com/applications>