Kirk Lougheed

Diversity Statement

Completing my PhD at McMaster University has allowed me to begin my teaching career with exposure to a wide variety of students. McMaster is a large, publicly funded university, similar to many publicly funded state schools in the U.S. Thus, I have had the opportunity to interact with students who come from very diverse backgrounds. McMaster serves a very ethnically, socially, and economically diverse student body. Likewise, students come from a plethora of academic backgrounds, and a significant number of students are English language learners. In leading tutorials and lectures I have developed skills in presenting complex philosophical ideas to this very diverse student body. I count it as a privilege to be able to teach philosophy to so many students who in past times would not have had the opportunity to attend university.

Additionally, it’s worth noting that the benefits of cognitive diversity have been recognized as truth conducive as least since John Stuart Mill published his famous text, *On Liberty*. I have developed Mill’s line of argument in my own research in social epistemology. In my peer-reviewed article, “The Epistemic Value of Deep Disagreements” I argue that fundamental worldview disagreements are beneficial. Even if they aren’t obviously resolvable they may very well help us get closer to the truth. For instance, by encountering different perspectives we are better able to critically evaluate our own perspectives. Thus, while there are strong moral reasons for wanting academia to be more inclusive, it’s also the case that having a wide variety of perspectives may help us arrive at the truth.

There are well documented systemic problems of racism and sexism, among other problems, in higher education. These issues pose challenges to any university department, and unfortunately the discipline of philosophy has been particularly plagued by them. In many ways, philosophy departments are lagging behind the times when it comes to broader societal norms of diversity and inclusion. I won’t attempt to diagnose why this is the case. Rather, I want to close by showing what I will do practically to promote diversity as an instructor and researcher.

I will strive for gender and ethnic balance on syllabi focused on contemporary philosophical topics (inasmuch as this is possible). For instance, including women authors can help students from diverse backgrounds feel that their voices are valued. I will also strive facilitate class participation in way to be as inclusive as possible. I will seek to prevent one student or group of students from dominating class discussion. One way to accomplish this is by taking a learner-centered approach to learning. Learner-centered approaches shifts the burden of learning from the instructor directly to the learners, by requiring active participation from every learner. One popular leaner-centered technique is called ‘think-pair-share’. Students are asked to think about a question, find a partner and share their answer, and then share it with the class. Even in larger lectures this can work as the instructor can call on a limited but variety of different partners to share. Another learner-centered technique is called the ’90 second essay’. Students conclude the class by writing down the most important points from the lecture in 90 seconds. As an instructor I would begin the next class by addressing some of content from the 90 second essays previously submitted. This includes affirming correct answers and correcting misconceptions. These are just two examples of leaner-centered approaches that ensure all students in the classroom are given a voice.