Section 3: Teaching, supervising, supporting, and mentoring students

Community college, college, and university campuses are among the locations in our society where there is the greatest diversity of representation of groups assembled together for shared purposes and for a significant length of time. Yet this does not guarantee that the educational experience will be effective or inclusive for all of those present on our campuses. What sorts of practices have been found to promote effective and inclusive teaching, and how are these connected to issues about the structure and content of the curriculum, of classes and discussions, and of other forms of instruction such as supervision and mentorship? How can instructors provide in their classrooms sufficient structure and support to sustain clear and high expectations for all students while also fostering respectful exchange of diverse opinions and perspectives? How can philosophy reach out to non-traditional or underrepresented groups of students? In what ways can students be encouraged and enabled to make their own contribution to creating and maintaining their learning community? With these and other questions in mind, here are some practices for faculty and graduate instructors that have helped promote reflective choices about diverse aspects of teaching.

Classroom teaching
While the teaching of philosophy is more than a sum of parts, it can be useful to consider the elements of teaching and teaching programs, and the distinctive ways they can promote or hinder the attainment of our goals in teaching along with the learning experience of students. Among these elements are the following:

Curricular design
The shape and content of a curriculum, whether by design or not, tends to be seen by teachers and students as conveying information about what is deemed to be most important, central, or foundational in the field, and what is peripheral. Similarly for questions about how philosophy might connect with other areas of inquiry, or about the role of philosophy in helping students develop skills and critical abilities that can contribute to their learning generally, or about philosophy’s relation to practical life. In making decisions concerning the curriculum, departments are thus encouraged to take up such questions reflectively on a periodic basis, rather than allowing them to be settled by default.

Course content
Evidence suggests that course content can also communicate to students information about what is most valued within philosophy, or who is most capable of doing philosophy. This speaks in favor of incorporating authors of diverse backgrounds as well as philosophical content from diverse cultural traditions into syllabi and throughout the course. This may involve adding non-traditional topics, incorporating secondary literature, or inviting guest lecturers, and treating these contributions as integral to the course as whole. But this should be done with critical self-awareness: for instance, non-Western philosophical traditions often do not fit neatly into traditional Western philosophical categories, so including them can be more complicated than simply adding content. Instructors are encouraged to read widely in the relevant areas, to consult with colleagues or specialists working in these fields, and to attend panels and conferences devoted to these
areas. Departments can also reach out to other departments and programs, invite area specialists to speak, and explore the possibility of making appointments in these areas.

Resources for diversifying course content include the following:

- The APA's Underrepresented Philosophers Directory (UPDirectory)
- The APA's Diversity and Inclusiveness Syllabus Collection
- Society for Teaching Comparative Philosophy
- The Deviant Philosopher
- American Society for Aesthetics Diversity Curriculum Grants

When instructors remain current in their subject areas and strive to explore new areas, this contributes to enriching undergraduate instruction and better prepares undergraduates for subsequent coursework or careers. Similarly for remaining current with pedagogical research on effective teaching and learning, both within a given area and in such general areas as learning how to interpret text and write papers. Discussing teaching methods and coordinating content with colleagues in philosophy or other disciplines can also help foster undergraduate learning beyond individual classes. All of this takes time, and departments and other academic units are encouraged to provide various forms of support for such efforts, and to help faculty and graduate instructors to identify other sources of support. Finally, in choosing course content, instructors should be mindful of the financial burdens placed on students, e.g., the expense of assigned books, and should work with libraries or other resources on campus to help ensure equitable student access to course materials, while also helping students become aware of these resources.

Course structure

While some courses by their nature are flexible and open-ended, many students come to philosophy courses without a clear idea of what to expect, or of what will be expected of them. It typically is useful, then, for instructors to develop clear objectives for their courses, and to communicate these to students at the start of the term and on the course syllabus and website. Similarly for any assumptions about what skills or disciplinary content the course will assume. This will help students to make informed choices and to understand why the course and its assignments take the form they do. When a course requires flexibility or adaptiveness, instructors can help students stay oriented by making the changes clear to students and maintaining an accessible up-to-date syllabus.

By varying the types of assignments used, working to make writing assignments relevant and level-appropriate, and taking steps to ensure that tests are based upon the material students have been asked to master in the course, instructors can help minimize the extent to which differences in the backgrounds students bring to class will affect their overall performance. Some instructors have had success using practice exams, practice problem sets, and sample papers to aid students in figuring out what kinds of study or effort is required to succeed, and to level the playing field between those with different educational backgrounds. At the same time, instructors are also encouraged to be open to alternative ways in which students can establish that they meet course prerequisites, or can enrich their backgrounds outside of class in order to master course material.

One successful strategy is to scaffold course assignments, especially in introductory courses, so that students have ample opportunity to practice the skills they will need to succeed on important assessments.
In teaching new students how to write philosophy papers, for example, instructors might ask first for thesis paragraphs and outlines, instead of full papers, and later offer one-on-one conferences to discuss initial drafts. They might also refer students to writing centers and support elsewhere in the college or university.

By employing active learning techniques—e.g., the use of small-group discussions, student presentations and debates, role-playing, team-based exercises, experiential learning, multiple media of instruction, and ungraded assignments evaluated by fellow-students—instructors can make the classroom accessible to students with a variety of learning styles, and can also gain valuable feedback about how well students are doing or what they might need in order to succeed. Many have found that active techniques also tend to encourage greater participation in subsequent classroom discussions and to increase student willingness to approach instructors, e.g., in office hours.

Teach Philosophy 101 hosts a large set of resources, including sections on “Change-of-Pace Exercises” and “Non-traditional Materials.”

**SEE ALSO: Section 3, Appendix A: Some suggested practices in teaching philosophy**

**Grading and assessment**

Grading is most effective when performed in a timely manner: a reasonable goal is within two weeks of submissions or examinations. Whenever the nature of the assignment permits it, grading should be performed under a veil of student anonymity (even though, in practice, complete anonymity might not be possible). Students may be asked to provide detachable cover sheets, use student ID numbers, or submit using online classroom learning platforms. Providing distinct and clearly specified criteria (e.g., a rubric, especially in introductory courses), publicized in advance and explained to students, can be especially helpful to students without extensive background in philosophy or similar courses. Clearly specified criteria also help instructors to make clear both high expectations and their confidence in students’ ability to succeed through continued effort and practice in meeting these criteria. Comments that indicate strengths as well as weaknesses, and that suggest concrete ways to improve, can increase the learning value of assigning papers. When working with graduate student instructors or undergraduate student preceptors, faculty may want to calibrate grading across sections of the class, and to discuss ways of providing constructive feedback to students throughout the course.

**Classroom atmosphere and management**

Structured interaction and facilitation are important for enhancing student learning and promoting inclusion in the classroom. When informal expectations and rules of engagement are not made explicit, students from underrepresented and marginalized groups, or students who lack cultural capital, suffer a disadvantage. To address such issues, instructors discuss with students policies for encouraging wider participation: for instance, some instructors have had success with brainstorming and collectively agreeing to a set of “ground rules” on the first day of class.

Instructors are encouraged to take some time at the start of the term to clarify the roles and responsibilities of students. For example, what is expected with regard to class attendance, preparing for class, completing assignments, respecting fellow students in discussions, participating in course surveys, and adhering to academic integrity in their work? For written assignments, instructors are encouraged not to take for granted that students understand proper citation practices, and to provide them with appropriate links to sources of proper citation practices and to institutional guidelines for academic integrity, drawing attention
to these questions in class. Instructors are also encouraged to explain their own commitments with regard to, e.g., fair and timely grading, respect for students, ensuring accessibility and accommodation, and availability outside of class.

It is also a good practice to spend some time at the beginning of the course giving students an opportunity to share information that might be relevant for supporting their learning. For example, instructors should make an effort to learn their students’ preferred names (and pronunciation), while also clarifying how they would like other students to refer to them. It is particularly important to respect students’ pronouns. Some instructors ask students to turn in questionnaires where they may privately indicate their level of preparation, learning or other disabilities, special needs, naming preferences and pronunciation, and pronouns. By circulating the questionnaire to all students, and collecting them from all students, instructors can avoid singling out students or placing the burden upon individual students to initiate the providing of such information.

Monitoring and understanding discussion dynamics is a complex but key part of effective instruction, and may include the following: whether students feel both that they understand how to participate in classroom discussion and that they have adequate opportunity to do so; whether each student, in fact, is able to exercise this opportunity; whether negative and positive feedback are distributed equitably; whether instructors’ informal questions, greetings, and jokes, as well as thought experiments, hypothetical cases, and examples, resonate with some segments of the student body and not others; whether insensitive language and comments are quickly addressed; and whether students feel that they may make use of—without being reduced to—their social identities and backgrounds. Anonymous mid-course evaluations can be helpful for understanding discussion dynamics and the experience of individual students. Instructors are encouraged to model philosophical dialogue that is critical but constructive in the service of shared aims of greater understanding, e.g., in which people’s views are treated charitably, their contributions are acknowledged, and their ideas (not their ability or character) are under evaluation.

Departments can provide faculty and graduate instructors with valuable feedback by instituting some form of regular teaching observations, either by peers or by instructional specialists at the institution. The pedagogical value of such observations will be enhanced if they are used for formative purposes and not exclusively for the summative assessment of instructors.

The Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) network offers a collection of resources on their website: “Best Practices for the Inclusive Philosophy Classroom”

**SEE ALSO:** **SECTION 7, APPENDIX A: SOME GENERAL NORMS FOR DISCUSSIONS**

**Classroom community building**

For many students, and perhaps particularly those from underrepresented and marginalized groups, gaining a sense that they are members of the academic community is not automatic. Instructors can encourage a greater sense of community in the classroom by ensuring (in classes where this is feasible) that they and the students all know each other’s names and pronouns, and working together with students to generate a common list of expectations and norms for classroom discussion, which can be revisited and updated periodically. Active learning techniques can also be used in ways to promote community and to ensure that students work with classmates outside their own self-selected groups.
Institutional partners and students in difficulty

Writing centers, libraries, academic support centers, women’s centers, multicultural centers, and centers providing academic support for student athletes can contribute importantly to the success of students from diverse backgrounds. Instructors should familiarize themselves with the various institutional resources available to students, make students aware of how to learn about such resources, and encourage their use. Most institutions also have procedures instructors should follow when they believe a student is in academic difficulty, and academic advisors are often a good source of initial consultation. Department and other academic units should provide such information to instructors at the beginning of each term, since procedures and services often change. Instructors may also need to be aware that the sources of a student’s difficulty with course material can be complex, and can reflect disadvantages in the student’s background or ongoing challenges owing to financial, familial, or medical difficulties. Making contact with a student in difficulty to invite the student to come to office hours or encourage the student to consult with their advisor can help the instructor understand the student’s situation and help the student make contact with appropriate services before the difficulties become severe. Such contact can also provide an opportunity for the student and instructor to work together to develop a roadmap for returning to good standing in the course. Instructors should also be informed of their responsibilities when they have reason to think that a student may be a danger to themselves or others, or may be subject to some form of harassment.

See also: Section 8: Mental and emotional health and safety

Accessibility

It is a good practice when writing syllabi and announcements to place emphasis upon the commitment to an affirmative principle of ensuring that all students have full access to the course and its content, as opposed to merely “accommodating students with disabilities.” Instructors should clearly indicate on the syllabus and emphasize in class that there are opportunities for students to meet privately and discuss any concerns they might have about access, assignments, and so on. Most colleges and universities have special offices of services for students with disabilities, and students can be encouraged to make contact with these offices, which often are also able to give instructors detailed recommendations about how to provide appropriate accessibility. Instructors have a vital role to play in making all aspects of the course accessible, from ensuring that the room is wheelchair-accessible, to using videos with captions, to writing on the board in large and clear print, to making arrangements for extra time and private rooms for examinations, and so on. Departments and other academic units should provide instructors with information about what is considered a reasonable arrangement to accommodate religious holidays, lactation needs, caretaking responsibilities, and student work and athletic activity, as well as language difficulties students may experience. Instructors who do not receive such information are encouraged to request it, and to be sure that their own accommodations align with shared guidelines. Instructors should strive to cultivate relationships of trust with their students so that appropriate arrangements can be made that are both respectful and consistent with student responsibility for course material and assignments. In some cases, students may make requests (e.g., to record lectures) owing to disabilities they prefer not to disclose, and consultation with student disabilities services may provide a way of protecting student privacy with respect to their fellow students.

See also: Accessibility and accommodation checklist
**Events for students**

Events that are not a part of the regular curriculum may still play an important role in student learning (e.g., departmental talks, undergraduate philosophy clubs, and discussion groups). Departments should attempt to organize events in such a way that it is not expensive to participate in them. For instance, if local events such as conference dinners and outings to coffee shops or bars are not paid for by the department, organizers should take into consideration that some venues could exclude poorer or underage students from participating.

**Special opportunities for talented students**

Instructors may be able to help highly talented students to identify co-curricular opportunities that enable them to deepen their engagement with philosophy, e.g., participation in a student journal, submitting work for publication, independent study, undergraduate research projects, and attending conferences and philosophy summer camps. These opportunities can be especially important for talented students who come from backgrounds in which they have not had such opportunities in the past, though, of course, all talented students should be encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities.

**Diversifying the graduate curriculum**

The APA recognizes that departments are constrained by financial limitations, faculty size, and institutional support in taking steps to diversify the graduate education they offer. Therefore, the following are intended as recommendations motivated by increased demand for scholarship and teaching in historically underrepresented areas of philosophy. While these recommendations are targeted to the graduate curriculum, many are applicable to the undergraduate curriculum as well.

4. Departments that can do so are encouraged to offer a broader range of courses in areas that have been historically underrepresented. This includes courses in Philosophy of Race, African/Africana, African American, and Caribbean Philosophy, Arabic and Islamic Philosophy, Asian and Asian American Philosophy, Latin American and Latinx Philosophy, Philosophy of Disability, Indigenous Philosophy, Feminist Philosophy, Philosophy of Gender, and LGBTQ Philosophy. These courses should be taught by qualified, preferably full-time faculty, and should be offered regularly by the department and count towards fulfilling graduate requirements. Specializing in underrepresented areas can be burdensome for students due to opportunity costs. Allowing them to fulfill a course requirement while pursuing their desired field of study, an opportunity not currently available to many students interested in these areas, would mitigate this burden. Departments that are part of a graduate consortium should consider coordinating across departments to offer a broad array of courses in these areas. In addition, when departments cannot hire faculty in these areas, they might consider hiring visiting faculty with relevant expertise.

5. If a graduate department lacks the necessary faculty to teach graduate courses in underrepresented areas of philosophy, they can consider allowing students to take courses in other departments (such as African American Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Chicana/o Studies, Sociology, Political Science, etc.) as part of their program of study. Giving students this option would enable them to gain expertise in these underrepresented areas, but it should be done in a way that doesn’t undermine offering robust philosophical training. Additionally, departments should support students in taking language courses beyond the standard French, German, Greek, and Latin to allow
students to develop the necessary expertise to engage with primary texts in some of these underrepresented areas of philosophy.

6. We encourage departments to think beyond coursework when considering how to diversify graduate education. For example:

- Departments can support graduate student reading groups focused on marginalized areas of philosophy by providing copies of books, refreshments/meals, and hosting visits from scholars to lead discussions.

- Consider inviting speakers specializing in underrepresented areas of philosophy for departmental colloquia. Students should be given ample opportunities to interact with these visitors.

- Hosting pedagogy workshops for graduate students on incorporating marginalized or underrepresented areas of philosophy into their teaching. These events may receive departmental support with reserved time and outside experts leading the workshop sessions.

- Facilitate graduate students visiting other philosophy departments with experts in marginalized or underrepresented areas of philosophy. In cases where in-person visits are not feasible for administrative or financial reasons, departments are advised to consider facilitating the ability of graduate students to take or audit courses online (if available) from such experts, including paying for registration fees, etc.

- Departments could offer financial support for graduate students attending workshops, conferences, and summer seminars focused on marginalized or underrepresented areas of philosophy. Additional assistance from a student’s home department may be necessary to cover expenses and ensure attendance.

- Departments might be able to use technology, such as videoconferencing, to provide graduate students with training in underrepresented areas of philosophy when in-person instruction is not possible (e.g., online class visits from experts working in these areas).

- Departments can leverage internal and external grants to support graduate training in underrepresented areas. Although many grants are only available to faculty, departments are encouraged to find ways to incorporate requests that align with diversifying the graduate education they offer.

**Supervising dissertations, undergraduate theses, and independent or directed studies**

Supervision is a core part of the teaching of philosophy but can pose problems owing to a lack of formal structure or clear expectations. The APA recommends that faculty strive to maintain principles of transparency, accountability, and respect for the students they supervise. Faculty are encouraged to work with students early on to develop a framework with clear and explicit expectations for student and faculty alike. Advisors and advisees are jointly responsible for maintaining the advisor’s familiarity with the general state of the advisee’s research so that the advisor can represent the student’s progress accurately at student reviews and discussions of special fellowships. Some find helpful the formula that an advisor should be
“partial to the student but impartial to the student’s work,” encouraging students as they develop their ideas, but also drawing upon the advisor’s experience and perspective to guide students toward feasible projects, to give students an accurate idea of how their work can be improved, and to help students understand the relation of their projects to the current state of the discipline. Here are some general guidelines, which obviously need to be adapted to special situations:

**Meetings**

Faculty supervisors and their advisees should discuss in advance a mutually acceptable and pedagogically effective schedule of meetings, as well as an understanding about what is normally expected of both in preparation for a meeting. If the student is in residence, meetings should take place no less than once or twice per term, but every two or three weeks is a common norm, especially in the case of undergraduate advisees or early in the development of a dissertation project. In some cases, meeting as often as once a week may be appropriate. If the student is not in residence, some arrangement should be made to coordinate expectations and keep current information about how to contact one another.

**Feedback**

Whenever possible, feedback on student work should be timely, and possible delays should be anticipated and explained to the student. Faculty have many demands upon their attention, and students generally should be encouraged to send reminders if a deadline is approaching, or if feedback is unusually delayed without explanation.

**Professional opportunities**

In addition to the regular work of advising, faculty can enhance student development by keeping aware of departmental or alternate sources of support, travel funding, etc., for students, and recommending that students apply when appropriate. Students may also need encouragement to consider submitting their work to journals or conferences, to apply for summer institutes or workshops, to attend talks and seminars, or to engage in reviewing and networking. When appropriate, faculty should introduce students to colleagues and visitors. One potentially valuable practice is for faculty to invite students to attend conferences with them, and co-author or co-review papers. Faculty should also make efforts to become aware of special opportunities—whether in philosophy or beyond—available to students from underrepresented groups, and encourage their qualified advisees to apply for these opportunities.

**Sharing resources and expertise**

Faculty are encouraged to share with their students such resources as journals, email lists, newsletters, calls for papers, blogs, and other electronic resources. Students may be unfamiliar with many resources, or unable to assess the potential value or reliability of resources, and faculty can take the initiative in providing information and guidance. At the same time, faculty should apprise students of what sorts of questions or appeals are appropriately directed elsewhere.

**Progress and review**

Departments should establish formal procedures and criteria for reviewing the progress of their graduate (and majoring) students. These procedures and criteria should be explained at the beginning of the program, and reviewed again at the beginning of each academic year, allowing students time to prepare for deadlines.
Letters of recommendation

Letters of recommendation should be honest and informed, and faculty asked to write letters should feel they can decline if they will not be able to write a positive or informative letter. Faculty should familiarize themselves with current norms in writing letters of recommendation, and be aware of some of the ways in which such letters can unintentionally exhibit or create bias. When students are applying for jobs, placement directors usually review faculty letters for consistency and accuracy in the information they provide about the student’s career in the program and the current state of the student’s progress. Questions about consistency or accuracy should be brought to the attention of letter writers, as should any questions about the inclusion of inappropriate material in the letters (e.g., unprofessional comments or stereotypic language). Responsibility for the content of a letter lies in all cases with the letter writer, though if significant unresolvable issues arise in reviewing a letter, these may need to be dealt with through joint consultation with the department chair.

See also: Section 2: Contemporary forms of bias and discrimination

Teaching letters

Evidence of teaching effectiveness is an important part of the dossier, and departments should have processes that enable graduate instructors to assemble a varied and well-documented teaching portfolio. Obtaining evidence of effectiveness should not be left to student evaluations alone—departments should arrange multiple faculty observations of teaching over the course of a graduate career, and participate actively in improving institutional student evaluation processes. Faculty should also consider nominating especially effective students for teaching awards. Faculty who write teaching letters for students should be made aware of current expectations for such letters, and should be mindful of the ways in which student evaluations or faculty reports on teaching can embody unintended bias.

See also: Section 2: Contemporary forms of bias and discrimination

Mentoring and supporting graduate students

Graduate programs with sufficient personnel have sometimes found it beneficial to establish a system for offering mentoring to students that is parallel to the formal relations of faculty supervision. In such cases, departments should make an effort to identify mentors (who can be drawn from the graduate community as well as the faculty) with whom students are likely to be comfortable raising questions, and with whom students can discuss matters that might be difficult or inappropriate to bring to an academic advisor or chair. Mentors should follow the principles of accountability and respect outlined in the previous section, and be aware of reporting obligations under existing legislation (such as Title IX and the Clery Act), but should also be aware of the need for discretion in sharing or reporting information. Here are some further guidelines:

- Mentors should be clear about what types of support (professional, personal, etc.) they are able to provide. No one mentor should be expected to fulfill all roles, and, ideally, students should develop relations with several mentors over the course of their time in graduate school. However, mentors should remain open and supportive even if they personally are unable to help a particular student or in a particular situation. Faculty mentors should recommend and make introductions to other potential mentors—other faculty, more advanced students, or other members of the academic and non-academic community—who might be suitable. Note that, while it often is helpful for students to
have mentors with backgrounds similar to their own, mentees can still have excellent mentoring experiences with mentors who do not share their backgrounds.

- Mentors should take initiatives to get to know their students and their students’ circumstances and background, as well as any special needs or concerns students might have.

- Mentors should remember that they might be taken as professional and personal role models. By telling mentees of their own mistakes or disappointments, and how these were overcome, they may encourage students to experiment and help students cope with mistakes and challenges. An ideal mentoring relationship is reciprocal, as each learns from the other. However, mentors should be careful to respect boundaries—a rough test sometimes used: if one would hesitate to discuss or share X (something one has heard from a student) with other students, then X is potentially an inappropriate thing to share, generally. In allocating mentorships, it should be taken into account that personal relationships between mentor and mentee can undermine some of the functions of mentorship and be a source of inappropriately privileged access to departmental information and resources.

- Mentors are encouraged to actively provide occasions in which students can raise concerns about their professional lives, or about how their professional lives intersect with their personal responsibilities or well-being, or about matters of financial or intellectual need. Making such occasions a routine part of advising mentees can minimize the extent to which they might be felt to intrude upon student privacy or autonomy.

**See also: Section 8: Mental and emotional health and safety**

- Mentors can help students to identify forms of internal or external support or recognition. Often these possibilities do not come to the attention of students in the normal course of events, so it is a good idea for mentors to review with students on an annual or term basis what such possibilities for support or recognition might be. Included in this review can be possibilities for submitting student work or proposals for conferences, publication, or grants.

Whether or not a department decides to institute formal mentoring relationships as well as other forms of student advising, departments should periodically revisit whether the overall structure of supervision and oversight for its graduate students is adequate, or functioning to meet existing needs. Program reviews and retreats can also be an occasion for such reflection. Keep in mind that, while considerable attention is devoted to the structure of the curricular aspects of graduate training, supervision of independent work, research assistantships, and dissertation advising are often at least as important in a student’s philosophical and professional development, and thus the appropriateness and effectiveness of these relationships merit consideration in their own right. Here are a few guidelines:

- In cases (for example, in the first years of graduate study) where advisors are assigned, departments should pay attention to student needs in making such assignments.

- It is a good practice for programs to have explicit procedures for finding and changing advisors, and to bring these procedures to attention of faculty and students alike on a regular basis, in addition to posting these procedures on a departmental website.

- Students can benefit from multiple lines of support. If students have only one connection with the department, they are in danger of “falling through the cracks” in the event that their sole advisor or mentor goes on leave or fails to maintain sufficient communication.
• Departments should help make faculty aware of programs that the college or university offers for the development of supervisory or mentoring skills. When these programs are effective, departments should encourage faculty to participate, and should consider participation in such programs a positive factor in evaluating faculty teaching.

• More generally, departments should seek ways of recognizing and rewarding good supervising and mentoring, by making faculty contribution in these areas a component of faculty reviews, and nominating faculty for relevant awards or course relief. This includes being attentive to whether some faculty are overburdened with advising and mentoring, and finding ways to counteract or offset this.

• In addition to formal supervision and mentoring, departments should provide regular informal opportunities (e.g., departmental picnics, receptions, weekly tea or coffee) for students to meet and develop relationships with one another and with faculty.

• It is vital that departments ensure that all faculty and students are aware of institutional, state, and federal policies on discrimination and sexual harassment. Institutions typically have detailed guidelines concerning faculty-student relationships, and faculty should be made aware of these policies on a regular basis. Not only are these policies important for preventing inappropriate faculty-student relationships, but advisors or mentors might be the first person approached when a student has a concern of this kind. If such concerns are to be dealt with appropriately, it is vital that faculty have up-to-date information on legal requirements and institutional norms in these very sensitive areas. Faculty who are mandatory reporters of complaints of harassment or discrimination should be aware of this role and what it involves.

• Some useful sources on advising and mentoring include the following:
  - The National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE program at the University of Michigan, charged with increasing the representation and participation of women in STEM careers, has published two reports: Giving and Getting Career Advice: A Guide for Junior and Senior Faculty and Creating a Positive Departmental Climate: Principles for Best Practices.
  - The University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School has published guides on mentoring for faculty and graduate students.

Financial support
Departments should be mindful of the financial burdens faced by many graduate students, and the limited family resources some may have. In addition to providing an adequate living stipend (e.g., a stipend that takes into account the local cost of living and does not require students to take out loans in order to pursue their studies), departments are encouraged to take the considerations into account:

• Applying for graduate school can be expensive due to application fees and the costs of submitting official test scores, e.g., for the GRE and TOEFL. Institutions are encouraged to explore such steps as elimination of application fees, application fee waivers, elimination of test requirements, or acceptance of unofficial test scores.

• Graduate students often receive general information about the financial package that they would receive, but it is often unclear when they will receive their first paycheck, what fees they might be responsible for, when their summer stipends will be paid, and so on. These matters can pose real
hardships for students who are not wealthy, cannot rely on familial support, have higher expenses owing to dependents or medical conditions, must travel from abroad, or lack access to credit cards. Departments should routinely make this kind of detailed financial information available to students as early as possible.

- Some departments make travel and research funding available on a case-by-case basis, without clear guidelines as to how much money each individual may request or can expect to receive. Such uncertainty can discourage students with fewer financial resources from making plans or commitments to attend conferences and other professional events. Thus, departments should be as transparent and equitable as possible in establishing rules and criteria for the allocation of such funding, and for opportunities to request additional funds. Departments should also help students become aware of relevant external grant and fellowship opportunities, and encourage them to consult the APA website for APA and non-APA sources of support. Since some of these sources of support require an extended application process, bringing relevant possibilities for external support to the attention of students at various points in their graduate career is desirable.

- Many institutions expect graduate students to pay up front for conference travel and expenses and be reimbursed later, and this may result in long waiting periods between making a payment and receiving funds. This disadvantages low-income students and faculty, along with international students who may not be initially eligible for US credit cards. Departments are strongly encouraged to offer direct payment of travel expenses, and to monitor how long it takes to process reimbursements. Consider developing workarounds if reimbursement times are longer than a month.

- If there are opportunities for graduate students to earn extra money, e.g., by additional teaching or grading, these opportunities should be allocated through procedures that are fair and transparent, and details of remuneration should be clearly established in advance.

- Some institutions have graduate student labor unions that collectively bargain for working conditions, job security, higher salaries, and health benefits, and which have established grievance procedures for overwork, workplace harassment, and so on. In such contexts, departments are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the union contract, to ensure that their policies are in line with the contract, and to advise students concerning available union services or procedures.

**Ombudsperson**

Some departments have had good experience with establishing a faculty ombudsperson or ombudspersons to whom students can bring concerns about climate, procedures, interpersonal conflict, and the like. This is a distinct function from advising or mentoring, and the choice of an ombudsperson or persons should be made with an eye toward this distinctive role. There can be an advantage in students having this additional path by which to seek counsel and assistance, especially since the advisory or mentoring relationship can itself become a source of concern, and some possible sources of concern will involve the chair. Moreover, students may be reluctant to bring a concern to the attention of the department chair without having discussed it with someone who has the experience and familiarity with institutional and professional norms. The existence of an ombudsperson apart from the usual system of advising or administration thus can mean that students voice concerns that otherwise would go unheard. Students should be aware of the ombudsperson(s), and how they can be contacted, even outside of normal office hours.
However, if a department establishes an ombudsperson, there should be a clear understanding of the scope and responsibilities of this role in relation to other supervisory, mentoring, or administrative roles. It is important for faculty to be aware that issues such as sexual harassment and discrimination are not merely interpersonal or intra-departmental matters, and must be reported to the college or university Title IX officer and handled by appropriate official procedures. Partly as a result of the potential for conflicts between the ombudsperson’s role and institutional requirements and procedures with respect to harassment and discrimination, some departments that initially experimented with appointing an ombudsperson have since abolished the program, occasionally at the urging of the college or university administration.
Section 3, Appendix A: Some suggested practices in teaching philosophy

The following additional guidelines for effective teaching of philosophy were drafted by the APA Committee on Teaching Philosophy and are reproduced here. Other resources on teaching philosophy are available on their website: APA Committee on Teaching Philosophy.

Active learning: Good teachers employ active learning techniques, which include in-class exercises such as the following (revised from Tom Drummond’s Best Practices in College Teaching):

- **In-class Writing:** Think-pair-share, focus questions, in-class journals, or lecture/reading summaries.

- **Objection Exchange:** Students bring to class a paragraph-long objection to the reading and exchange papers with a partner at the start of class. Students respond to their partner’s objection. The papers return to their original authors, and the original author responds to the partner’s objection to the original objection. This activity encourages close reading, develops dialectical skills, and prepares students to write philosophy papers.

- **Brainstorm:** Brainstorming generates ideas, encourages creativity, involves the whole group, and demonstrates that people working together can create more than individuals alone.

- **Round:** Each person has a 2- or 3-minute opportunity to express a point of view on a given topic, or passes, while others listen. This activity elicits a range of viewpoints and builds a sense of safe participation.

- **Concept Models/Maps:** The teacher distributes a handout that asks a series of leading questions. Students work in small groups to build a conceptual model. They make their own diagrams and record their own observations.

- **Simulations and Games:** Simulations and games, with specific guiding principles, rules, and structured relationships, can last several hours or even days.

- **Learning Cells/Peer Teaching/Jigsaw:** Each learner reads different selections and then teaches the material to a randomly assigned partner. By explaining conceptual relationships to partners, tutors are forced to develop their own understanding.

Lectures: Good teachers strive to craft engaging lectures. Research has shown that attention tends to wane after 10–20 minutes, so good lecturers often speak in 10-minute segments, before pausing to interact with the class, e.g., by asking questions, performing a close reading of a passage, assigning an in-class writing response, introducing a small group activity, giving an immediate mastery quiz, or telling a story.

Discussions: Good teachers take active steps to facilitate group discussion, e.g., reading two conflicting passages aloud in class, asking students to relate the reading to a personal experience, assigning a problem that requires the reading to solve, exploring a case study, surveying the group for a response, showing a relevant video clip, or developing a role-playing exercise. They should also strive to generate and moderate open, active, and inclusive critical discussions. Good instructors typically wait for students to gather their
thoughts (instead of calling upon the first raised hand), e.g., by asking students to write down responses before anyone speaks aloud, waiting for 2–3 hands before calling on the first person. Good instructors also typically encourage wider participation by, e.g., calling on people in order across the room, drawing names randomly, and inviting people who have not previously spoken to speak. They respond reflectively to each student contribution, e.g., by paraphrasing the main point, asking for clarifications, challenging students to expand upon the initial idea, or offering parallel or meta-comments such as “I was confused about that myself” or “You've identified the first step of the argument.” They artfully restrain students who monopolize discussion, reach out to students who rarely speak without putting them on the spot (e.g., by calling on them only after an activity in which the student has had time to think, or by citing points the student has made in previous work or conversation), compliment good questions, and find ways to reignite discussion after it stalls. At the end of class discussion, taking a few minutes to summarize and assess the discussion is especially useful for students, particularly those who might have been struggling.

**Professional development:** Not all philosophers naturally excel at teaching, but, like any subfield of philosophy, teaching can be an area of expertise. Philosophers should actively study the latest developments in pedagogy, both in and outside of philosophy, in order to continually improve their teaching. Philosophy departments might purchase monographs on the teaching of philosophy and feature them prominently in their department libraries. And campus teaching centers can provide resources on the latest innovations and best practices in teaching.

- The American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT) organizes development sessions at APA meetings as part of the Teaching Hub, as well as a biennial conference. At these events, philosophers can participate in interactive workshops on philosophy teaching and learning.

- Many publications, such as the “The Teaching Workshop” on the APA Blog and the *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy*, provide active forums in which philosophers can reflect upon their own teaching and share their experiences.

- On questions of the allocation of effort and time management, some faculty have found useful Robert Boice, *Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus* (Pearson, 2000).

- Further resources are also available at the University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching.

**Contributions to the scholarship of philosophy teaching and learning:** Philosophy instructors who have spent extra time exploring a particular pedagogy or reading on a particular issue in student learning should consider publishing an academic paper on the subject for the benefit of their peers. Journals that publish in this area include the following:

- *Teaching Philosophy*

- *AAPT Studies in Pedagogy*

- *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*

**Pedagogical activism:** Recognizing the value and importance of teaching requires active support, especially at universities that emphasize research over teaching, on both individual and institutional levels. Individual instructors should support their institution’s efforts to improve faculty teaching and student learning by attending development events, mentoring less experienced teachers, and making the discussion
of teaching a central part of department culture. Departments should support teaching by rewarding excellent teaching, developing meaningful tenure and promotion standards for good teaching, and advocating for the fair and equal treatment of non-tenure-track instructors, who are often responsible for teaching of large, and sometimes vulnerable, student populations.
The question of how best to evaluate teaching is complicated. One standard method of evaluating teaching involves using student evaluations of teaching (SETs). However, recent studies have given rise to concerns about the use of SETs. In a statement endorsed by the APA Board of Officers, the American Sociological Association (ASA) identifies two major concerns. First, SETs appear to introduce biases against, e.g., women, people of color, and members of other groups. And second, SETs do not appear to be particularly good measures of teaching effectiveness. In light of these concerns, the ASA has suggested some guidelines about how to best use SETs in evaluating teaching (see below).

SETs should not be the only materials that are used to evaluate teaching. Other methods for teaching evaluation may include, for example, peer evaluations, analysis of teaching materials, instructor reflection statements, and the like. All these materials can be useful in evaluating teaching, but none of them tells the whole story on its own. Peer evaluations can provide a useful perspective on how an instructor teaches a course, but they can also introduce biases held by peer evaluators and introduce or exacerbate problematic power dynamics. Teaching materials can provide insight into course design and assignments, but do not fully capture what happens in the classroom. Instructor reflection statements can reveal the instructor’s perception of a course, but might be biased in the instructor’s favor. All of these materials can give misleading impressions of an instructor and a course, but also can provide potentially useful information. That includes SETs; despite the concerns noted above, they can be useful sources of student feedback, and can potentially serve, e.g., to counterbalance biased peer evaluations.

Below, you will find some practical advice. Section 1 describes advice from the ASA statement on best practices for using SETs. Section 2 provides resources on SETs and their uses, and also on more holistic approaches to evaluating teaching.

Best practices for the use of SETs

Based on concerns about SETs, the ASA statement proposes the following best practices:

- Treat SETs primarily as opportunities for student feedback, rather than formal evaluations of teaching effectiveness. If possible, focus SET questions on the students’ experiences.

- If SETs are used to evaluate teaching quality, use them in combination with other types of evidence, such as peer observations, reviews of teaching materials, and instructor self-reflections.

- When used to evaluate teaching effectiveness, SETs should not be used to draw direct comparisons among instructors. Data from SETs can be helpful to identify patterns in an instructor’s teaching over time, but the data do not reliably indicate whether one instructor’s teaching is more effective than another’s.
• When using data from SETs, take distributions, sample sizes, and response rates into consideration. They constitute crucial context for interpreting SET scores.

• Train those who evaluate faculty or graduate student teaching (such as department chairs, personnel committees, and hiring committees) in how to interpret SET data and how to assess teaching holistically.

**Selected further resources**

In examining the now substantial literature on the biases involved in teaching evaluations (of all sorts), colleges and universities are responding in a number of ways. Teaching and learning centers are offering ways of thinking about more comprehensive and multifaceted approaches to teaching evaluations. In the remainder of this guide, we offer some resources for those interested in a deeper dive into this discussion.

**Resources: More information on SETs**

[Brenton and Cashin (2009)](#) offer a quite comprehensive look at the variables that do appear to impact SETs and those that do not. Unsurprisingly, many variables beyond the instructor control appear to have impacts on student evaluations, including the class size, course level, discipline, and so on. Additionally, rankings are impacted by SET design (also beyond the instructor's control in many cases), for example non-anonymous evaluations tend to be higher.

The University of Michigan Center for Research on Teaching and Learning offers an accessible and digestible summary of research findings on SETs. It addresses the state of research regarding whether, and to what extent, SETs correlate with things like teaching effectiveness, student grades, an instructor’s ability to ‘entertain’, and other factors. It also offers some suggestions regarding how to best use SETs.

Vanderbilt University's Center for Teaching provides a comprehensive list of suggestions and resources for applying best practices in SETs. In addition to providing links to and brief summaries of relevant research, it provides practical advice about how to use SETs. It covers topics like talking with students about SETs, making sense of student evaluation feedback, getting early- or mid-semester student feedback, and also provides resources for interpreting SETs and how to use SETs to improve teaching.

The University of Washington's Center for Teaching and Learning website offers a rich resource guide to best practices for evaluating teaching. Their approach focuses on a holistic vision of teacher evaluation in which student evaluations are but one part. Particularly helpful is the section on student evaluations which offers an abundance of resources (e.g., on bias in SETs, debates over SETs, and understanding and interpreting SETs) and practical advice for both instructors and tenure and promotion committee members.

**Resources: Holistic methods of evaluating teaching**

The University of Kansas offers a rubric for benchmarking teaching effectiveness that represents a significant break from traditional evaluations. Here teaching effectiveness is judged across a number of dimensions, including evidence of mentoring, involvement in teaching and learning communities, metrics for classroom climate, and general teaching practices (e.g., syllabus design, learning activity design, and so on).

The University of Colorado at Boulder offers a significant revision to the teaching evaluation process. It focuses on ensuring three voices are included in teaching evaluation: self study, student voice, and peer
review. Here they also offer a rubric for evaluating teaching using these three distinct voices. They also offer some implementation guides for those interested in adopting this teaching evaluation strategy.

University of Oregon has undertaken a comprehensive revision of the teaching evaluation process as well. Their site includes some very useful documents for mid and end of semester student evaluations, documents for personnel committees, as well as a summary of their revision process.