

# Nicholaos J. Jones

## Teaching Portfolio

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### 1 Teaching Philosophy

A philosophy course is more than an opportunity for students to fill a notebook and obtain knowledge they might use for trivia. It is an opportunity for students to practice thinking and to learn how to talk with their peers in a respectful, constructive manner about important philosophical topics. Doing philosophy is a chance for students to obtain (and refine) tools for thinking about any topic whatsoever.

When I teach, I aim to expose students to the give-and-take of philosophical discussion. I try to present material at a level of detail and rigor that allows students to make connections between different ideas without being overwhelmed with information. I assess student comprehension in a way that prompts them to apply what they learn (rather than merely regurgitate notes). I prefer to teach in a way that gets students actively participating and invested in course material, allowing them to learn by doing as well as by listening. When class size permits, I think it is important to devote a portion of almost every meeting to discussions or working problems in small groups: I have been pleased with how this tends to increase the number and quality of student questions and insights. On occasion, I also incorporate less traditional activities, such as game show-themed review sessions, in order to motivate student participation and engagement with course content.

### 2 Summary of Teaching Experience

#### *Experience as an Instructor (Summer 2003 - Present)*

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy  
Philosophy 150: Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking  
Philosophy 215: Asian Philosophy  
Philosophy 367: Contemporary Social and Moral Problems in the United States

#### *Experience as a Teaching Assistant (Autumn 2001 - Spring 2006)*

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy (grading and recitation)  
Philosophy 130: Introduction to Ethics (grading and recitation)  
Philosophy 153: Probability, Data, and Decision Making (grading and recitation)  
Philosophy 215: Asian Philosophy (grading)  
Philosophy 250: Symbolic Logic (grading)  
Philosophy 270: Philosophy of Religion (grading and discussion groups)  
Philosophy 301: Ancient Philosophy (grading)

### *Additional Pedagogical Experience*

"Sartre's 'Existentialism is a Humanism'", substitute lecture in Existentialism, May 2007.

"Sand Gardens, Tea, and Zen", an informal talk presented to residents of Steeb Hall at The Ohio State University, April 2007.

"The Daoist Case Against Pursuing an Education", an informal talk presented to The Ohio State University Undergraduate Philosophy Club, January 2007.

"The Logic of Hypothesis Testing", substitute lecture in Probability, Data, and Decision Making, May 2006.

"Theories of Confirmation", guest lecture in Philosophy of Science, April 2006.

"Can Computers be Creative?", an informal talk presented to The Ohio State University Undergraduate Philosophy Club, November 2005.

"Can There Be Time Without Change?", presented at The Ohio State University Undergraduate Philosophy Club Annual Conference, May 2004.

"Obeying Physics, Making Choices, Scaling Morality", an informal talk presented to The Ohio State University Undergraduate Philosophy Club, November 2003.

"The Apparent Meaning of Life", presented as part of the Faculty Friends Program to residents of Morrill Tower, October 2003.

"Kant's Paradox of Incongruent Counterparts", an informal talk presented to The Ohio State University Undergraduate Philosophy Club, April 2003.

"Atheism", presented as part of a roundtable discussion on religion, sponsored by The Ohio State University Student Government Association, March 2003.

"The Construction of *Callipolis* as Idealized Model-Building", an informal talk presented to The Ohio State University Undergraduate Philosophy Club, May 2002.

"Justice in the City & the Soul", substitute lecture in Ancient Philosophy, February 2002.

### **3 Courses Taught as Instructor at The Ohio State University**

*Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy* (taught five times; thirty to forty-eight students).

This course introduces students to the major areas, historical figures, and movements within philosophy; it also introduces students to the art of philosophical inquiry. Topics include: the relation between our minds and bodies; skepticism and our knowledge of the external world; arguments for and against the existence of God; whether our actions are free or determined; and a comparison of several ethical theories. Course requirements include two examinations, semi-weekly quizzes, and two short papers.

*Philosophy 150: Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking* (taught five times; twenty-four to forty-two students). This course is an introduction to arguments and critical thinking. It teaches students the role and importance of arguments; how to recognize, extract, and reconstruct arguments; how to distinguish between the different kinds of arguments (deductive, causal, analogical, inductive); how to detect common reasoning errors and fallacies; and how to distinguish good arguments from bad ones. Course requirements include weekly quizzes and three examinations.

*Philosophy 215: Asian Philosophy* (taught twice; 150 students). This course is a broad survey of the major ancient philosophical worldviews from India, China, and Japan. Upon successfully completing the course, the student will be able to explain major cultural and philosophical themes in Indian, Chinese, and Japanese philosophy, and avoid common mystifications of Asian philosophies. Course requirements include three examinations, five quizzes, and nine journal entries.

*Philosophy 367: Contemporary Social and Moral Problems in the United States* (taught three times; fifteen to twenty-five students). This is an intensive sophomore-level writing course, concentrating on the analysis and evaluation of philosophical argumentation concerning contemporary social and moral problems about gender, race and ethnicity, and class. The course develops fundamental skills of expository writing; develops students' skills in oral communication and discussion; and develops their skills in reconstructing and critically evaluating ethical arguments. Topics include: a brief overview of moral theories; same-sex marriage; racism and affirmative action; poverty; sexism; feminist issues in the workplace; and abortion. Course requirements include bi-weekly reading summaries, occasional quizzes, three essays (four to six pages each, plus at least one draft), one in-class presentation, and participation in two class debates.

Syllabi for these courses are available upon request.

#### **4 Sample Written Student Evaluations**

A. Here are some samples of anonymous end-of-term written feedback from students emphasizing positive aspects of my teaching:

"I really enjoyed lecture. I actually wanted to come to class! You are interesting and give good explanations for things. I'd recommend this class to friends."

"Nick did a great job presenting the material and being prepared for the lectures. He always had something to talk about. His lectures were enlightening at the very least. I had no idea I would be able to learn so much in a few short hours once a week. Well worth my Saturday morning. He has inspired me to take another course in philosophy, perhaps I'll bargain with my school and trade a philosophy/logic course for statistics."

"I had a freakin' sweet time during the lectures and learned much because the ideas were presented very structured on the chalkboard. Then we discussed the hell out of them. This made it easy to understand the ideas."

"I enjoyed the overall in-depth discussions on topics. They were very thought-provoking and helped me to view topics from a whole new perspective."

"You're very thorough when teaching, use great examples (that are relevant) and teach the info clearly."

"The thing I liked most was the open environment. It created an atmosphere that was unique to this class. The ability to voice your opinions and argue others' opinions rarely appears in a class."

"I liked the format of class discussions. I always left class with a story for my roommate."

"I want to thank you for an interesting class and commend you on your ability to instruct with what seems to be an incredible act of ease for you. You are a great teacher and I certainly hope I have the opportunity to sit in one of your lectures again."

"Nick Jones is enthusiastic, energetic, and quite amusing. He has a unique teaching style, and seems to enjoy teaching philosophy. With the class that I currently take it's about 2 1/2 hours of information to learn; I can honestly say not one second is boring. Philosophy is confusing to me, but Nick has a way with telling stories and giving great examples to help us remember the different beliefs and which philosopher thinks [sic] those beliefs."

B. Here are some samples of anonymous end-of-term feedback that have guided my attempts to improve my teaching:

"Maybe slow down discussions on more in-depth subjects."

"More opportunity for grades. Quizzes maybe."

"Maybe evaluate students on the articles assigned. Otherwise, other than turning in papers and getting them back it was kind of pointless to go to class." (for *Philos. 367*)

"I would change how fast we covered material and create more examples to illustrate points."

"I would change the fact that we weren't clearly instructed on the material to review for quizzes/exams."

"The quizzes were fair, but I would have liked more worksheets to do in class so we could practice the problems together." (for *Philos. 150*)

## **5 Selected Responses to Student Feedback**

The biggest adjustment I have made to my teaching, in response to end-of-term student feedback, has been my willingness to have weekly graded assignments. I had been giving reading assignments for every class, but these were not graded; I trusted students to complete the assignments. I also had been giving three or four major assessments as the major determinants of final grades. Some students had requested the opportunity for more grades, others had noted that they lacked motivation to keep up with the material, and still others had frankly admitted that they did not bother to come to class since they saw no point in doing so. In response to these comments, I now have weekly quizzes in my *Philosophy 101* course; the questions are a mix of multiple choice, true-false, and fill-in-the-blank. The quizzes are designed to encourage students to attend lectures and review their notes on a weekly basis. I also put variants of quiz questions on major examinations, to motivate students to correct their mistakes from the quizzes. I have received positive feedback for this alteration. As one student writes of the quizzes (for *Philosophy 101*), "It gets you to at least look over your notes every week."

Likewise, in response to similar comments I now require students to submit weekly reading summaries in my *Philosophy 367* course. These are one to two page critical summaries of the articles we discuss during class, graded on a scale of check minus / check / check plus. I have been given positive oral and end-of-term feedback for this alteration. I also have weekly quizzes in *Philosophy 150*, imitating the structure of *Philosophy 101*.

## **6 Student Evaluation of Instruction Reports**

The next page contains a cumulative student evaluation of instruction (SEI) table that summarizes the courses I have taught as an instructor at OSU. The most salient details about this table are the continuing improvement in student evaluations of the *Philosophy 101* and *Philosophy 150* courses. The ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the best.

I take the especially high ratings for the Summer 2004 and Summer 2005 courses to be due, in part, to the kind of students who tend to enroll in summer courses. The low ratings for Spring 2004's *Philosophy 150* are explained, in part, by my inexperience teaching the course (it was my first time); evaluations from Spring 2005 and 2006 show that the course improved.

	<i>The instructor was well-organized</i>	<i>The class was intellectually stimulating</i>	<i>The instructor was interested in teaching</i>	<i>The instructor encouraged independent thinking</i>	<i>The instructor was well-prepared</i>	<i>The instructor was interested in helping students</i>	<i>I learned greatly from this instructor</i>	<i>The instructor created a learning atmosphere</i>	<i>The instructor communicated the subject matter clearly</i>	<b>Overall rating</b>	<b>Number responding [percentage of class]</b>
<b>Summer 2003</b> Introduction to Philosophy (101)	4.14	4.24	4.62	4.57	4.15	4.52	4.14	4.38	4.05	4.10	30 [70%]
<b>Winter 2004</b> Introduction to Philosophy (101)	4.60	4.84	4.92	4.52	4.76	4.72	4.60	4.68	4.60	4.64	33 [75%]
<b>Autumn 2004</b> Introduction to Philosophy (101)	4.56	4.56	4.91	4.62	4.79	4.71	4.47	4.56	4.56	4.76	42 [80%]
<b>Summer 2005</b> Introduction to Philosophy (101)	4.86	4.72	4.90	4.72	4.79	4.90	4.69	4.72	4.90	4.89	29 [60%]
<b>Autumn 2005</b> Introduction to Philosophy (101)	4.77	4.60	4.90	4.78	4.82	4.78	4.72	4.74	4.74	4.81	67 [78%]
<b>Spring 2004</b> Introduction to Logic (150)	3.83	3.67	4.25	4.00	4.25	4.17	3.75	3.83	3.50	3.92	24 [50%]
<b>Spring 2005</b> Introduction to Logic (150)	4.59	4.53	4.71	4.65	4.59	4.65	4.53	4.65	4.59	4.94	17 [68%]
<b>Spring 2006</b> Introduction to Logic (150)	4.74	4.44	4.85	4.68	4.82	4.94	4.53	4.74	4.76	4.79	34 [81%]
<b>Autumn 2006</b> Introduction to Logic (150)	4.89	4.63	4.89	4.74	4.96	4.93	4.78	4.81	4.74	4.85	27 [69%]
<b>Autumn 2006</b> Asian Philosophy (215)	4.78	4.59	4.89	4.41	4.88	4.72	4.51	4.63	4.69	4.78	81 [60%]
<b>Summer 2004</b> Contemporary Moral Problems	4.78	5.00	4.89	5.00	4.89	4.89	4.56	4.89	4.89	4.88	15 [60%]
<b>Winter 2005</b> Contemporary Moral Problems	4.41	4.62	4.80	4.78	4.56	4.67	4.14	4.49	4.57	4.74	38 [79%]
<b>Winter 2006</b> Contemporary Moral Problems	4.71	4.76	4.90	4.95	4.62	4.81	4.38	4.71	4.52	4.80	20 [91%]

## 7 Teaching Development Efforts

In addition to responding to student feedback, I have attempted to improve my teaching by pursuing opportunities offered within the university. In September 2005, I participated in a mock teaching session for incoming graduate students at the behest of the Department of Philosophy. Following a brief (fifteen minute) mock lecture by a professor, I led a short (ten minute) mock recitation on the lecture in front of seven or eight new teaching assistants. Afterwards, as a group, we discussed the techniques I used, how to correct my mistakes, etc.

In Autumn 2005 and Autumn 2006, I served as a facilitator in Ohio State University's Annual Orientation on Teaching and Learning, a university-wide conference for new teaching assistants sponsored by the Office of Faculty and TA Development. I facilitated three sessions. Preparing for the First Day teaches new TAs how to encourage and maintain student involvement, respond to individual contributions, and employ questioning strategies. Facilitating Classroom Discussion teaches new TAs how to set teacher-student expectations, set the tone for a course, and build positive rapport with students. Teaching in the Independent Course, team taught with a faculty member, assists new TAs in planning, creating learning objectives, handling common classroom situations, and applying active learning strategies. Leading these sessions forced me to reflect on why I do what I do in the classroom and allowed me to share ideas with other graduate students during the preparation for the conference.

In Winter 2005, I served as a reviewer for an introduction to philosophy textbook, Jack Bowen's *The Dream Weaver: One Boy's Journey Through the Landscape of Reality* (Pearson/Longman). This allowed me to think about what makes for a good textbook.