

Teaching, Research, and Engagement

Since the beginning of my professional academic life in 1992, my ongoing goal has been to both balance and excel at my pedagogical responsibilities, my scholarly pursuits, and my commitment to my various professional communities. Not only do I believe that a balance here can be attained and maintained, but I am convinced that each pursuit greatly enhances the other. I believe the passion I have for scholarship is directly responsible for, and contributes to, my ability to maintain my passion as a teacher. Moreover, I sometimes integrate my work as a teacher into my professional publications: a recent essay on holism launches from a dilemma arising within a class conversation as one example. Both of these, then, motivate and inform my engagement activities, and from these activities I often get a sense about what topics might be important to write about and what my students might need to know to prepare them for life as a productive and informed citizen. Though I have a difficult time teasing apart the three dimensions of my professional life, I will address each in turn below.

1. Teaching

The time I spend as a teacher is rewarding and exhilarating. My students serve as a constant source of amazement, excitement, and personal enrichment; so much so that during my time in class I certainly learn and expand my own views as much as they do. I can say with all honesty that I love teaching. I love the idea of sharing a semester with a class of students, the idea of working through a body of material on some particular topic together, the idea of watching their growth, of being likewise changed and enlightened by the process. At the risk of sounding a bit corny, I cannot honestly imagine a more sacred relationship than that between teacher and student. I take this relationship very seriously. After all of these years, I still get nervous before each semester, I still have trouble sleeping at night after an evening seminar, I still replay classes over and over in my mind trying to think of ways to make them even better the next time through.

I want my students to see that ideas matter, that critical thinking is a skill that can be both powerful and enlightening. Although I find it difficult to generalize about my approach to teaching, I think it is perhaps an attempt to illustrate the importance of understanding the historical context of philosophical issues in order to apply them to contemporary concerns. Because I believe that philosophy in general is relevant, and that answers to philosophical questions are vital, I attempt to convey this importance to students as well. I like what philosopher ██████████ said, "*To be able to be caught up into the world of thought—that is being educated.*" But I am drawn strongly to the idea that our work in the world is important, that the world has a right to expect those of us of privilege to work to make the world a better place. So, I like what the philosopher and educational theorist ██████████ said as well, "*Any genuine teaching will result, if successful, in someone's knowing how to bring about a better condition of things than existed earlier.*" Perhaps my pedagogical goal is to combine these two thoughts into every classroom experience.

To serve this end, I work to get students involved as active participants in their own education. Regardless of the size of classes taught and the familiarity, or lack thereof, with the topic at hand, I openly encourage and expect students to participate in the discussions in class. I strive to foster an environment in my classes where students feel comfortable in expressing and re-examining their views, asking questions, and offering up criticisms of positions on the table. I think of philosophy as more of a skill to be acquired than as a body of knowledge to be absorbed (and then forgotten). I want students to leave my classes more curious, more skilled, more careful, more humble, more empowered, and more thoughtful than when they came to me.

I appreciate and take seriously the goal of teaching articulated in the *MSU Mission Statement*: “in order to prepare them to contribute fully to society as globally engaged citizen leaders.” I have been driven in my teaching at MSU by two goals (both of which jibe with the MSU Mission Statement): an effort to both empower the students and to get them to pay attention. So much environmental discourse is depressing and therefore disempowering. Moreover, the lack of reflective critical thinking skills, intellectual honesty, and an inability to understand problems and ask good questions means that students often do not pay attention to what is happening around them (or to them) – which could also be called a kind of disempowerment. I work hard in my classes to address this with my students, thinking of ways to model and to teach them to be attentive, to understand problems, to go beyond the way things are typically presented, to understand how it is that problems can be addressed critically, and to help them to believe that they can choose to be smart, kind, and productive citizens. I want them not only to appreciate and see dilemmas when they might be tempted to see clarity (or vice versa), but to be able to think of creative ways to begin to solve problems and overcome dilemmas. This approach has allowed me to engage the students as a collaborator and facilitator more than a teacher in the traditional sense. As just one recent example, this past semester (Spring 2009) in my senior seminar on the topic of Sustainability, the students prepared a letter to a number of environmental leaders that I read at the opening of a small conference. The letter was thought to be so moving that a film company (Green Fire Productions) that was taping the event asked the students to read it on film. They then re-recorded the film, set it to music, and it is now posted on line. After reading the emerging Sustainability Curriculum from Harvard University – the Ruffolo Curriculum – the students and I also crafted and sent a detailed, point-by-point critique and recommendation to the group putting it together. I do, however, realize that this is possible only because the students are eager for it and respond positively to this approach – though I’m unsure of whether the approach inspires them to perform this way, or if they are already eager and this approach simply facilitates that eagerness.

Perhaps most interestingly I pushed my own limits with regard to handing responsibilities over to the students in my classes. That is, sensing a high level of ability among my students, I have worked hard while at MSU to treat students more as collaborators in the classroom and less as students in the traditional sense. I have been impressed and excited about how well they reacted. I also pushed even harder with regard to helping them with their writing and in helping them to think and work collaboratively across traditional disciplines. To that end I have also broadened my allowances for “final projects” in many of my classes. For example, in my LB 335 class this past year, final projects could be a standard paper, a series of poems on the topics of class with prose explanations, a professional poster presented to the class, a group presentation on some topic in class also presented to the class, or the creation of a short film. I was impressed with the eagerness with which students embraced these more creative options: one student created a wonderful 8 minute film, many wrote poems, many did posters, and the few who wrote papers wrote in more creative and persuasive ways than I have seen before. In my LB 492 course students went even further: creating an in-class game show that brilliantly conveyed the themes of the course, re-creating a board game to be played according to the different rules representative of different ideas of sustainability, and creating children’s literature and re-writing fairy tales that demonstrated the positions and dilemmas within the subject matter. Sensing an eagerness to combine academic rigor with a creative approach, I also pushed the bounds of classroom readings, including an even wider variety of means of expression, from more formal academic writings, to film, poetry, fiction, and more popular narrative – working to get the students to see and assess positions and arguments all around them with the idea that intellectual work is not sequestered to a classroom and that arguments and positions come in a variety of packages that they should be able to unwrap and understand.

Most certainly there are many ways to at least attempt to measure success as a teacher. I think those of us who teach and think seriously about teaching recognize that it is very difficult if not impossible to normalize "teaching success." In each of the ways that teaching success is thought to be quantifiable, however, I believe I have been successful. Since the beginning of my teaching career, my student evaluations have consistently demonstrated successful teaching. At my former universities scores hovering in the 3.7-3.8 (out of 4.0) range on the "overall, how would you rate this instructor" question. One semester I somehow managed to obtain perfect 4.0 scores on this question for each of the 2 classes I taught. My SIRS scores while at MSU have also been high, and the comments from students about my classes have been positive. Although I am unsure whether this is an actual measure of rigor, I have also maintained a respectable discrepancy between the high teacher evaluations that I receive and the more modest GPAs that my classes receive. At a previous university (a self-identified "teaching institution") I was thrice nominated for the University Excellence in Teaching Award and was presented with this award in the spring of 2002. At MSU I was nominated for the Excellence in Teaching and Scholarship Award in the Fall of 2008 by Lyman Briggs College.

If the continued academic success of my students is a measure of my own success as a teacher then I have been successful. To date, I have sent approximately one dozen students on to do graduate work in environmental ethics and related fields. These students are either currently doing well in graduate school or have already successfully completed their graduate degrees. Colleagues around the country have commented that my students are well-prepared, hard-working, and manage to move through graduate programs at a respectable pace.

I have taken on many additional pedagogical responsibilities such as independent study projects with students, serving on many graduate committees all around the campus, guest lecturing in other courses on campus, creating and coordinating a Philosophy/Environmental Ethics major at a former university, involving undergraduate and graduate students in my teaching as well as my research projects and publications, taking students on field trips associated with the courses I teach, regularly teaching summer school and on-line courses, bringing in outside speakers, creating and coordinating lecture and colloquia series', and providing attentive advising to those who seek my advice as well as career counseling to recent (and sometimes not so recent) graduates. Students regularly comment on written evaluations that they believe I care about them, and they are correct.

2. Scholarship

I would like to suggest that any success that I have had inside and outside of the classroom as a teacher, is, in part, because of the experiences that I have as an active scholar. I also believe that my own work as a scholar very directly benefits my students. Such professional activity is not only personally rewarding and desirous in and of itself, but is, I believe, directly responsible for maintaining the passion and experiences that I need to remain a good teacher and to serve my students and university well.

Since the beginning of my professional career, I have enthusiastically and continuously engaged in scholarship. This was most challenging in my first 12 years of teaching given that I was saddled with a 4/4 teaching load and regularly had 200 students per semester. My work to date has been focused in the field of environmental ethics and philosophy. Though my scholarly work thus far is broad and touches at times on other disciplines closely aligned to philosophy, I think there is a single thread that ties it together. My work has focused on the attempt to understand the nature of the human/non-human relationship and what would be an appropriate ethical response to such realization. My earlier work was focused mainly on central issues within the narrower field of environmental ethics and on specific topics closely aligned to that field (such as the debate over the concept of wilderness).

More recently my work has broadened and shifted a bit given my growing network of colleagues from various disciplines, the nature of my appointment at MSU, and my own increased ability to move more easily between disciplines. Like many environmental philosophers, I have become convinced that more serious philosophical reflection and analysis is needed in many of our contemporary discussions. Most important for me, of course, are discussions about the relationship between humans and the non-human world. I am also becoming interested in *how* those conversations take place and in *how* that philosophical analysis is presented. I think good philosophical work can be done in a variety of ways and that a broadening of the ways in which philosophy could be done will enrich both public discourse and philosophy as a discipline.

In addition to continued work in what most would see as traditional philosophical writing, in the past 5 years I have worked closely with the Isle Royale Wolf-Moose Project; in fact, I am now their “official philosopher.” This is the longest continuous study of a predator prey system in the world and my participation in the project has been both personally and professionally rewarding. This collaboration has already produced a large number of published articles and conference presentations both within philosophy and ecology. We have a series of other essays either in press, submitted for publication, or in the final stages of preparation. We also currently have a book prospectus under consideration, and another book idea under development. Moreover, I am currently under contract with Island Press to write *Predator and Prey: The Story of the Isle Royale Wolf-Moose Project*. This writing project may also result in a companion volume of essays from the study, together with interpretations.

On my 2003 tax return I listed “professor and writer” as my profession for the first time. I have begun to think of myself more and more as a writer. Within the past few years some of my scholarly efforts have become geared toward more public and cross-disciplinary audiences. I have, for example, recently published essays in *The Ecologist*, I have one forthcoming in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and two others have come out in what might be seen as more literary venues. I have also been awarded two writer’s residencies to facilitate this work. Most recently I have prepared a photography exhibit feature 40 photos from the Isle Royale Wolf-Moose Project together with an exhibit guide designed to be both scientifically informative and ethically prompting. A near future project will attempt to measure the success of the exhibit. I have also just recently been extended an invitation to explore the possibility of some work on the Yellowstone National Park wolf project, and will be visiting the park in the Spring of 2010. These moves, I believe, are very much a natural extension of my commitments to the importance of sound reasoning, to making philosophy matter, and to the attempt to make sense of the ethical dimension of the human/non-human relationship. I hope to continue and expand my scholarly efforts in this direction.

I have also just finished and submitted the manuscript for a large anthology, *For All Time: The World’s Moral Obligations to the Future*, co-edited with philosopher and award-winning nature writer [REDACTED] and to be published by Trinity University Press. This book brings together over 100 essays from the world’s ethical leaders to address our obligations to the future in light of climate change and other environmental harms. Trinity is working to raise ¼ of a million dollars to promote this book.

These are only a few of my scholarly activities. A review of my CV is perhaps the best demonstration of my scholarship. I have published numerous essays, book chapters, encyclopedia articles, and book reviews in a wide variety of journals within and outside of philosophy. I have also presented approximately eighty conference or invited papers at a broad range of venues; a number of these have been conference keynote presentations or invited and endowed lectureships. I have also been invited to organize, chair, and moderate sessions at conferences in philosophy and natural resources. I co-edited and contributed to 2 large, well-received, and reviewed anthologies on the debate over the concept of

wilderness (*The Great New Wilderness Debate (TGNWD)*, 1998 and *The Wilderness Debate Rages On*, 2008). These large volumes have been dubbed “the standard volumes in the area, already a classic” and one previous reviewer of my work referred to them as the “gold standard.” My own contribution to that book (*TGNWD*) has been highly regarded, anthologized, translated into Chinese, used in classrooms, referred to by one reviewer as the best essay in the book (though I don’t know if I agree with that), and reprinted in a current environmental ethics textbook. References to that essay also appear repeatedly in the environmental ethics literature. In 2004, a book I co-authored, *American Indian Environmental Ethics: an Ojibwa Case Study*, was published by Prentice-Hall.

I am regularly called upon to serve as an editor, manuscript reviewer, grant reviewer, and essay and book reviewer within and outside of my discipline. Three of my published articles have been anthologized in recent environmental ethics textbooks and my work has been translated into Portuguese, Chinese, and Japanese. I also serve on the editorial board of the journal *Environmental Ethics*, the leading journal in my field. My work is regularly cited by other environmental philosophers, has been included in at least one discussion in an environmental ethics text (*Environmental Ethics*, 4th ed [redacted] as well as a discussion in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Both my work in the philosophy of Aldo Leopold and my work on wilderness appears in a wide variety of university classrooms across the country and internationally (e.g., I am aware that my early wilderness anthology has seen classroom use at least twenty-five universities in North America and Europe: most notably Harvard University, the UC Berkeley, The University of Chicago, the University of Edinburgh, Venice International University, and the University of Hamburg).

3. Engagement

I appreciate the part of the MSU mission statement that suggests that our work at MSU is, ultimately, to “lead to a better quality of life for individuals and communities, at home and around the world.” We live in a time that is immensely challenging and difficult, but also promising and filled with the opportunity to do good and meaningful work. I take the role of engagement within a land grant university very seriously.

The blurred distinction between scholarship and teaching is further frustrated as I factor in my work as an engaged academic. I want to do work that matters and I realize this means that I must move within and between academic and professional and public communities with as much grace and goodwill as I can muster. Since the beginning of my career I have eagerly accepted this challenge and have worked diligently to serve my university, my state, and my larger and various academic communities through my work.

I have always been an active, productive, and positive participant in departmental, college, and university governance. I have served on many committees, chaired job searches, chaired educational policy committees, created and directed an environmental ethics major, directed an MA graduate program in philosophy, been elected to represent peers on a variety of committees, and have always tried to calmly, wisely, and with good cheer help make my university communities flourish. I also regularly serve my professional societies as committee member, manuscript and book reviewer, dissertation evaluator, ethical policy creator, and editor.

I have given dozens and dozens of public lectures for a huge variety of audiences, I have fostered positive working relationships with the various state and Federal natural resource agencies to which my work most applies, I have participated in State and Federal policy discussions, and I have collaborated professionally with and have served organizations representing fisheries and wildlife biologists, soil scientists, anthropologists, foresters, and ecologists.