**Teaching Philosophy**
Kevin Patton, Ph.D
kevinpatton@unomaha.edu
Visiting Professor of Philosophy
University of Nebraska - Omaha

# Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy centers on nurturing intellectual curiosity and an appreciation of the philosophical process. I aim to cultivate a classroom environment where students develop essential skills in reading, writing, and critical thinking, while feeling encouraged to explore and share their ideas creatively and confidently. A key component of my approach involves integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools into specific assessments, allowing students to explore both the potential and limitations of this technology within the context of our course content. My concrete steps to ensure such courses meet these goals are described below.

## Nurturing Foundational Skills in Introductory Courses

In introductory and lower-level courses, I prioritize helping students acquire reading abilities, writing skills, and foundational critical thinking skills. Each week, students engage with assignments that require the submission of annotated notes. Each class begins with a student presentation over that day's reading which focuses on the student attempting to reconstruct the author's reading in standard form.

To support diverse student backgrounds, I provide structured handouts that detail the format and expectations for thesis statements and papers. This clear guidance helps all students, regardless of their educational, linguistic, or cultural backgrounds, to organize their thoughts and meet academic standards. Additionally, my partnership with the Samuel Bak Museum has allowed for the creation of a collaborative assignment which encourages students to apply course content to real-world contexts, fostering a collaborative relationship with the museum and enhancing their learning experience.

My introductory course exams are all in-person and handwritten. The first exam bridges the gap between high school and college exams, with a focus on multiple-choice questions and definitions, followed by short-answer questions. Subsequent exams increasingly emphasize critical thinking and writing, with fewer points allocated to multiple-choice and definitions.

To achieve this, I utilize artificial intelligence (AI) in my exams. I prompt an AI using a predetermined prompt based on course readings at the beginning of the exam. After completing the initial multiple-choice and definition sections, students critically analyze the AI's response, identifying its strengths and weaknesses. This exercise enhances their understanding of the material while developing crucial AI evaluation skills. This method not only addresses plagiarism concerns but also boosts students' confidence in their analytical abilities and critical engagement with AI.

**Teaching Philosophy**
Kevin Patton, Ph.D
kevinpatton@unomaha.edu
Visiting Professor of Philosophy
University of Nebraska - Omaha

---

# Deepening Analytical Skills in Advanced Courses

In advanced and upper-level courses, I expand upon the foundational skills developed in introductory courses. Students must still do their weekly annotated notes submissions, and nearly each class begins with a student presenting their reconstruction of the arguments from the day's reading. An additional assignment format is introduced in advanced courses which require the creation of visual representation of arguments twice during the semester. These assignments allow the students to create something as straightforward as a flowchart to represent an author's argument, but can also be as fanciful as a comic strip or short movie. This approach encourages critical and creative thinking, ensuring that students can articulate complex ideas in various formats.

Similar to the lower-level courses, AI plays a role in upper-level assessment. However, instead of analyzing a single AI summary, students are presented with multiple AI-generated summaries of different perspectives relevant to the course content. They are then required to select a specific number of these summaries and critically assess them for accuracy, completeness, and potential biases, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the material and the complexities of AI output.

# Addressing Plagiarism and Encouraging Authentic Work

While I recognize the potential of AI as a learning tool, I also acknowledge the challenges it presents. The integration of AI into specific assessments, as described above, directly addresses these challenges by shifting the focus from simply generating content to critically evaluating it. This approach encourages authentic engagement with the material and discourages passive reliance on AI. Furthermore, in-person components of exams and assignments, such as in-class scenario analysis in introductory courses and the diverse representation assignments in advanced courses, further ensure that students develop genuine analytical and creative skills.

# Emphasizing Transparency and Support Through Scaffolding

Teaching literature plays a significant role in my course design. I am committed to providing explicit and transparent explanations of grading criteria and assignment expectations. In introductory courses, the difficulty of readings gradually increases, applying scaffolding principles to support students' learning. In advanced courses, while readings are challenging from the start, I ensure clarity and transparency in assignments and provide curated feedback.

Scaffolding is particularly beneficial for students from diverse educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. In introductory courses especially, I have found that by starting with simple assignments and progressively increasing complexity, that I help all students build confidence

and competence. This structured approach ensures that every student, regardless of their background, can achieve success and feel comfortable engaging with the material.

## Fostering Brainstorming and Intellectual Growth

My goal is to create a classroom environment conducive to exploration of philosophical ideas, and an appreciation of the philosophical process. I encourage open-ended thinking, creativity, and the free exchange of ideas, helping students develop the skills and knowledge needed for advanced academic pursuits. By fostering a supportive and intellectually stimulating environment, I strive to empower students to reach their full potential and prepare for future academic challenges.

## Conclusion

My teaching philosophy revolves around inspiring intellectual exploration and fostering brainstorming. Through structured assignments, diverse representation methods, the strategic integration of AI, and a focus on scaffolding, I aim to support all students, especially those from diverse backgrounds. By creating an inclusive and engaging classroom environment, I help students develop essential skills and a passion for philosophical inquiry in the age of AI.