

# **Commitment to Diversity**

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I am committed to the diversification of philosophy as an academic discipline, and my efforts to achieve that diversification encompass my activities as instructor, as researcher, and as an organizer of academic events. I believe diversification of our discipline should be implemented along two axes: on the one hand, it should include diversity in the population (e.g. ethnic and gender diversity) of the discipline's members; on the other, it should include diversity of arguments and ideas. Below I describe some of the ways in which I have already contributed to the diversification of philosophy, as well as practices I intend to implement in the future.

As instructor, I have three priorities for the promotion of inclusiveness and diversity. The first is to make my students aware of phenomena like implicit bias that may unfairly affect our perception of people in underrepresented groups. The second is to encourage members of underrepresented groups to engage in class discussions and to take more philosophy courses. The third is to establish a climate of mutual respect between the parties to an intellectual debate and openness to different opinions.

With respect to implicit bias, I begin my courses with an explanation of implicit bias and its detrimental effects for people of underrepresented groups. I emphasize that the elimination of implicit biases is above all a matter of justice and fairness, but I also argue that it is in the best interest of our intellectual communities to eliminate implicit biases: if we dismiss somebody's ideas or capacities on the basis of unfounded stereotypes or subconscious biases, we risk missing out on novel solutions to problems and fruitful avenues of research. On the other hand, if, guided by our biases, we give more credence to somebody's opinion than is warranted by the actual evidence, we risk making costly mistakes. I explain that trying to eliminate implicit bias is thus not only beneficial for members of underrepresented groups, but also, in the long term, for the whole community.

To neutralize my own biases, I anonymize students' assignments before grading them. As soon as I started anonymizing student assignments for grading, I noticed the lack of a readily available and free program that did so automatically—I wanted to input my students' files into the program and have the same files anonymized as an output, with the possibility of renaming the files with their original names after grading. To solve this problem, I developed a short computer program that automates the

process of document anonymization, which I have made publically available through my website (see <http://martinabreu.net/software/blindIt.zip>). This program is free to use, download, and modify, it is independent of any grading platform (such as Turnitin or Blackboard), and is available for various operating systems. I believe that the use of this computer program can greatly simplify the anonymization of students' assignments while helping its users avoid common pitfalls throughout the anonymization process, thus making anonymous grading a more attractive alternative for many instructors. In the future I intend to keep developing this program to further simplify its use and increase its capabilities. My hope is that, by reducing the amount of effort instructors need to make in guaranteeing good anonymization practices, anonymization of students' written work will be more easily achieved. In turn, I hope this contributes to eliminate the effects of implicit bias in grading.

Turning to the ways in which I encourage members of underrepresented groups to participate in class, I have found that conversations with my students during office hours provide an excellent opportunity to point out when a student has made an interesting point during class, or raised a good question. I believe such encouragement is especially important for members of underrepresented groups, given that members of those groups often suffer from impostor syndrome.<sup>1</sup> My hope is that through continuous encouragement, members of underrepresented groups can overcome impostor syndrome and realize the value of their academic achievements and contributions.

Thanks to my conversations with many students, I have been able to grasp the wide variety of struggles students from underrepresented groups face throughout their academic careers. As a person of color, I am personally acquainted with some of those struggles, but my conversations with students have convinced me of the need to develop solutions tailored to each particular case. In the future, I intend to engage more actively with university administrators to promote counseling services directed especially to the needs of underrepresented groups.

Finally, I believe producing a climate of mutual respect during class is important in the promotion of diversity and inclusivity. Just as we should encourage members of underrepresented groups to become active members of our discipline, we should ensure that members of well-represented groups treat their underrepresented counterparts as respectfully as they treat one another. To this end, at the

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<sup>1</sup>See e.g. Cokley, McClain, Enciso, and Martinez (2013), "An examination of the impact of minority status stress and impostor feelings on the mental health of diverse ethnic minority college students", *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 41:82-95.

beginning of a course I emphasize the importance of mutual respect between the parties to a dispute and the openness to new ideas. In my experience, this initial explanation, followed by gentle reminders throughout the course should the need arise, has not only made students from underrepresented groups more comfortable when discussing their ideas in class; it has also made class discussions more fruitful, even when discussing sensitive issues.

In the future, I would like to improve my courses by increasing the number of assigned texts by authors in underrepresented groups. Though I have already tried this with some degree of success (via, for example, a thorough discussion of Princess Elizabeth's criticisms of Descartes' argument for dualism, or Ada Lovelace's observations about the possibility that Babbage's analytical engine was capable of thought), I am yet to strike an ideal balance between an adequate number of traditionally assigned readings and an adequate number of readings written by authors from underrepresented groups.

As a researcher, I have participated (either as speaker or as commentator) in several conferences of the American Association of Mexican Philosophers and in the Second Conference of Latinx Philosophers. Those conferences have given me a great opportunity to appreciate the wide variety of topics and interests other latinx philosophers are currently researching. At the same time, it has given the opportunity to engage in philosophical discussions about what it is to be latinx, whether there is or should be an area of philosophical research for latinx philosophers to focus on, and what kind of responsibilities we latinx philosophers have to our various communities. Though my areas of specialization do not include latinx philosophy, my participation in those academic events has inspired me to examine the connections between early 20th century Mexican philosophy and contemporary issues in the philosophy of race, a topic on which I would like to organize a research seminar or an undergraduate course (depending on departmental needs) in the near future.

As an organizer of the New York Philosophy of Language Workshop (NYPLW), I have been in a position to promote diversity more directly. Started by graduate students from NYU, Columbia, and CUNY, in the last few years the workshop has become one of the main venues for researchers (graduate students and faculty from all around the US and other parts of the world) in linguistics and philosophy of language to present new work to a specialized audience (an audience that very often includes prominent figures in the field). Since the beginning of my tenure as one of the workshop's organizers in 2015, one of my top priorities has been to have a schedule of speakers that promotes gender and philosophical

diversity. I believe my efforts concerning gender diversity have so far yielded positive results: for the last two academic years, almost fifty percent of our speakers have been women. One of my current goals as an organizer is to turn this positive trend into one of the workshop's permanent policies. As an organizer of the NYPLW, I have also made it a priority to invite proponents of arguments and ideas outside mainstream philosophy of language.

In the near future, I would like to organize a conference of latinx philosophers. I believe conferences of this kind play two crucial roles. First, they help build communities of latinx philosophers. Joining such communities has been beneficial for my academic career: it has helped me develop strategies to address the challenges I face as a member of an underrepresented group, and it has helped me become more confident of the value of my philosophical contributions. Second, these conferences promote the work of philosophers from underrepresented groups while helping the academic public at large realize the value of those philosophers' contributions.

To summarize, as instructor I have implemented anonymous grading to eliminate implicit biases and have developed a tool that can help other instructors in the anonymization process; I have also encouraged students of underrepresented groups to be more confident in their ideas and made every effort to produce a climate of mutual respect in class. As researcher I have participated in several conferences directed at latinx and Mexican philosophers, and intend to organize conferences of that kind in the future. Finally, as one of the organizers of the NYPLW, I have prioritized gender balance in our lineup of speakers, and promoted the discussion of ideas outside mainstream philosophy of language. Through these actions, I affirm my commitment to diversity.