

IU Philosophy Department Statement of Values

Approved: March 25, 2016

This statement of values is intended to promote the core educational and research missions of the philosophy department in a way that is respectful of all members of our philosophical community including faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, office staff, and guests.

Here “professional interactions” includes all professional settings, including classrooms, offices, other communal spaces (such as the Cogito Ergo Room), meetings, reading groups, colloquia, receptions, and department-sponsored meals. It also includes certain social settings, such as drinks with a speaker after a talk, events arranged by a social coordinator in the performance of that role, and in someone’s home if they are hosting department guests (such as during welcome weekend). While this statement of values addresses behavior in specifically professional settings, it is equally important that conduct in private settings not interfere with anyone’s ability to participate appropriately in departmental events or impede anyone’s professional growth and success. Of course, university policies and legal guidelines, such as those prohibiting discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, apply in all settings, both professional and private.

Principles

All professional interactions amongst members of our department should be guided by three basic principles:

Be respectful.

Be inclusive.

Be constructive.

These principles are intended to be, as stated, both uncontroversial and of general application, but also, because of their generality, to be flexible enough to take into account relevant differences across contexts of application. This flexibility is an advantage, but of course disagreements may arise in particular circumstances about whether or not a certain behavior counts as respectful, inclusive, and/or constructive, or, conversely, as disrespectful, exclusive, and/or destructive. In thinking about these, we should keep in mind how generally reasonable people might view the interaction, our goal of promoting a strong community in which everyone can thrive academically and professionally, and that there can be cases which it is difficult to think it through—that is to say, we should be respectful in disagreement in these cases too.

Explanations, comments, and illustrations

Be respectful.

Respect for others is a minimal expectation governing all professional interactions, and is essential for a community in which all can thrive.

Comments and Illustrations:

- In philosophical discussions it is important to show respect for all those who are present or listening in. Ways of showing respect include acknowledging and allowing for others’

contributions to the discussion, paying attention, letting someone finish a thought without interrupting, and so on. This does not require that one agree with others. Respect is compatible with criticism of another's arguments or conclusions so long as each person is allowed full participation and is not treated dismissively. Conversely, interrupting others, not listening to what they are saying, or ignoring when they have made useful points are failures to show full respect for them as participants in the discussion.

- It is disrespectful to mock, shame, publicly embarrass, or unreasonably single out someone for criticism or negative remarks. It is a sign of disrespect to make invidious comparisons, or otherwise treat someone in a manner that would lead to reasonable resentment or inappropriately cause discomfort.
- It is disrespectful to make comments or jokes that denigrate individuals on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religious or political affiliation, area of study, or career path.
- In colloquia, it is disrespectful to distract others or prevent them from fully participating. For example, starting a separate discussion in the back of the room while others are engaged with the speaker shows disrespect for the speaker and those asking questions, and others in the room who are trying to follow the interaction between the speaker and people who are asking questions.
- In graduate student offices, it is important to show respect for officemates and undergraduate students who visit these spaces. This includes presenting a reasonably professional appearance and respecting people's need for quiet for concentration. An unprofessional office space undermines the ability of graduate students assigned to the space to present an organized, mature, and professional appearance to their students, and can cause them to feel embarrassed to meet students there. Contributing to an unprofessional workspace disrespects others using it by undermining their ability use it for professional purposes, and by making them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in their own office.
- A component of respect in the classroom is attention to providing students equal access to opportunities to speak and be heard, to the instructor's attention, and equal treatment in relation to course policies.
- In interactions with office staff, it is important to respect them as persons, and to respect professional boundaries. They have complex jobs involving multiple pressing demands on their time. They should not be asked to perform duties or take on responsibilities that are not properly part of their jobs. They cannot, for example, serve the role of personal secretary for faculty, and they cannot make policy on behalf of the department. It is important to keep in mind also that requests for services must be made with a reasonable lead time.

Be inclusive.

Systematic exclusion is detrimental to the professional and philosophical growth of department members. All participants in an event should be able to participate in appropriate ways, and where possible wider participation with respect to the target audience for the event should be encouraged. This aspiration is compatible with groups that have a limited membership for a specific purpose, such as a women-only group, or a small reading group limited to advanced graduate students working on a topic. Exclusion from such groups should not be arbitrary and the formation of such groups should have a reasonable basis.

Comments and Illustrations:

- In philosophical discussions, a component of being inclusive is acknowledging when your question or comment builds on someone else's. To fail to do so sends a signal to the person that

(one thinks that) he or she is not really a part of the discussion or that his or her contributions aren't worth acknowledging. Similarly, entering a philosophical discussion with the goal of shutting someone down, or winning an argument at all costs, will also tend to signal to the interlocutor that he or she is not being treated as a full participant in philosophical discussion, or, to put it another way, his or her views are being excluded from serious philosophical consideration. Especially in certain group contexts, the effect can be to make the person who receives this treatment feel that he or she is not really considered a member of the community or isn't thought to properly belong in the community.

- It contributes to an inclusive atmosphere to make an effort to provide all those who are present at a colloquium discussion an opportunity to participate in it. In this connection, it is important to avoid non-verbal indications of philosophical disagreement in public situations that can be experienced as dismissive or as a personal rejection.
- Giving examples that perpetuate negative stereotypes can contribute to an atmosphere in which some members of the community may feel that they are regarded as marginal or insignificant members or that they don't really belong.
- In graduate classes, encouraging all students to participate contributes to inclusiveness, and it is important that every member's contributions be treated fairly by all participants in the discussion. This does not exclude, of course, disagreeing or offering criticisms, as long as it is focused on the content of what is said and not on who is saying it.
- Encouraging everyone to participate in departmental events, such as colloquia, meals with guests, and receptions, contributes to the inclusiveness of the community.
- Including on an equal basis all graduate students assigned to an office in decisions about how the shared space is to appear and to be used is an important component in being inclusive.
- While gossip in any group is probably inevitable and arguably plays a significant role in social bonding, malicious gossip, gossip that denigrates others, and gratuitous third-person personal criticism, even in off-campus settings, can have significant exclusionary consequences. It is important in pursuing the goal of an inclusive community in which members do not feel excluded that its members refrain from forms of gossip that tend to have this effect.

Be constructive.

A goal of our community is for professional interaction to be constructive in the broad sense of contributing to (or at least not undermining) each member's professional and academic development and success. An environment in which interactions are constructive enables all members of the department to develop to the highest degree possible. This is fully compatible with honest, candid criticism, which, offered in the right spirit, can make an important contribution to professional and philosophical development.

Comments and Illustrations:

- Generally speaking, in philosophical discussions, being constructive means that one's contributions aim at making progress on the issue at hand. Sometimes this may be matter of offering a counterexample, or identifying a gap in an argument, or offering an alternative view. Sometimes it may be a matter of filling in a gap in an argument or suggesting an example to think about, or an analogy, or a different argument for the same conclusion, or pointing out some literature that bears on the issue. Sometimes it may be a matter of asking a question the answer to which is relevant to the issue, without offering an answer to the question, or simply asking one's interlocutor to say more about what he or she is thinking. In contrast, dismissing an interlocutor's position (or an interlocutor) as stupid or confused, etc., is not being constructive.

- In offering criticism in a constructive spirit, it is useful to be open to the possibility that one has misunderstood one's interlocutor or made a mistake about the view or its implications, and it can be helpful in this connection to make clear how one understands the position one is criticizing.
- In interactions with students, constructive feedback, even when critical, is offered in a way that aims at facilitating improvement.
- Constructive contributions to meetings focus on the shared task at hand, and on ways to find and attain the best outcome.