

MICHIGAN PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT OF VALUES

Michigan Philosophy has a core commitment to building and maintaining a strong intellectual community in which everyone is safe, supported, and valued, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, religious or political affiliation, area of study, or career path. This commitment provides that basis for the following statement of values and related norms that serve to guide all aspects of departmental life.

There are three general values that provide guidance for professional interactions among members of our philosophical community:

1. Be respectful
2. Be inclusive
3. Be constructive

Due to their generality, these values are flexible enough to take into account relevant differences in different contexts of application. Of course, this sort of flexibility allows for disagreements in particular cases about whether or not certain behaviors count as respectful, inclusive, or constructive. In addressing such cases, it is important to strive to determine how reasonable people should view the behaviors and to be respectful when disagreement persists.

Regarding the three values:

1. Be respectful

Respect for others is a minimal expectation governing all professional interactions and is essential for a community in which all can flourish. Ways of showing respect include acknowledging and allowing for others' contributions to 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. Moreover, respectful interaction is incompatible with denigrating individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, religious or political affiliation, area of study, or career path, or implying that such individuals are not deserving of full participation in the intellectual life of the community.

It is important that interactions between staff and other department members exhibit mutual respect. Staff have a responsibility to be welcoming and helpful to everyone in the community. However, other members of the community also need to keep in mind that staff have complex jobs involving multiple pressing demands. Respect involves not asking them to perform duties or take on responsibilities that are not properly part of their jobs. It is also important to keep in mind also that requests for services need to be made with a reasonable lead time.

2. Be inclusive

The value of inclusivity requires that all members of departmental events be able to participate fully 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 the formation of groups that have a limited membership for a specific purpose, such as a gender-minorities-only affinity group meant to help relevant graduate students navigate certain challenges specific to them, or a small reading group limited to advanced graduate students working on a particular topic. In an inclusive community, such groups have a reasonable basis and lack arbitrary exclusion from membership.

Inclusivity also involves genuine openness to areas of philosophical inquiry and approaches to philosophical issues that differ from one's own. There are obvious practical reasons for tolerance of alternative viewpoints in a diverse intellectual community. But beyond those reasons, there is the consideration that taking alien perspectives seriously allows for one to develop a broader and more sophisticated philosophical outlook.

3. Be constructive

A principal 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 a respectful manner, can make an important contribution to professional and philosophical development. This is especially so if the criticism is offered in a constructive spirit and allows for serious consideration of responses on the part of the interlocutor whose views are being criticized.

In closing, a couple of points: First, this statement is intended to be fully consistent with academic freedom, and, indeed, we believe that the attempt to restrict someone's academic freedom is a violation of a core value of respect. The statement makes no substantive assumptions about the nature of philosophy aside from its being an intellectual pursuit in which reaching conclusions regarding fundamental questions on the basis of reasons is a regulative ideal. This pursuit can be difficult in the best of circumstances, and it is hindered when there is a culture of distrust and disrespect. It is hoped that the sort of reflection offered in this statement will serve to foster a supportive and collaborative intellectual environment in which the exploration of a diversity of perspectives and ideas can flourish.

Secondly, serious violations of these values that involve overt forms of discrimination or harassment of course call for official intervention by relevant offices within the university. However, it is hoped that in other cases department members can find ways to work through difficulties without resorting to such intervention. This statement is meant to describe what we as member of our community should each strive to do, and what we can expect from each other.