

PHP Committee

LETTER OF APPLICATION

Stephen Friesen, Ph.D.

July 20, 2019

Dear Members of the PHP Selection Committee,

I write to apply for Preferred Hiring II status, for the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of San Francisco. I have been teaching at USF since the fall semester of 2014, and my application satisfies the minimum completed course requirements for eligibility towards this teaching promotion (80 completed units). My teaching service has included course instruction in the Philosophy Department, the Environmental Studies Program, and laboratory instruction for the Environmental Science Department. This is an application for PHP II status in PHIL 244 (Environmental Ethics), a course which satisfies the D3 ethics requirement through the Philosophy Department.

For me the teaching of philosophy is vocational and ever-evolving. I believe the supporting documentation will demonstrate the strength, energy and skill that I bring to student instruction at USF. But because the standards for acceptance in PHP II may be more stringent, and because competition for PHP awards may be more severe, I have supplied a more considerable field of supporting documents than I did in my application for PHP I. I hope the committee will find merit in this more extensive collection of revised and supporting documentation.

My application includes my current C.V., a new statement of my Teaching Philosophy, a Statement of Support for Department and Program Learning Outcomes, and a comprehensive set of Additional Materials to give further evidence of my teaching strengths. Also included are a list of courses and sections I have taught at USF, a complete set of SUMMA and BLUE evaluations, and a sample syllabus. A letter of recommendation from the Philosophy Department Chair (Marjolein Oele) and from USF's Director of Educational Technology Services (John Bansavich) will also support my application.

Collectively these documents are meant to develop three themes that extend and enrich my previous application for PHP I:

1. A continuing record of teaching excellence and student engagement;



2. Developing teaching strength through the thoughtful implementation of technology - for which I am especially indebted to USF's Educational Technology Services;
3. Further paths in teaching excellence, including (i) professional presentations of my teaching pedagogy at the Biennial Yellowstone Science Conference, and (ii) the production of online teaching modules for use in the event of class cancellations due to fire-related disasters.

These documents attest to my considerable experience and breadth of teaching at USF and my skills in communicating difficult ideas. You will encounter evidence of my strong leadership in the classroom, balanced with an infectious presentation of philosophical content. Four themes concerning my teaching strengths are readily and frequently evidenced in these documents. The first is enthusiasm and likeability, demonstrated in student evaluations. Great course material can be (and has been) quickly undermined by a tepid and perfunctory presentation. My natural enthusiasm for my classes brings out the most infectious quality of sometimes difficult or abstract ideas. Second, is my ability to communicate abstract concepts in a concrete and relevant style. Enthusiasm must be accompanied by an aptitude for making abstract concepts and arguments relevant to students, through the use of imaginative examples which draw from the culture familiar to students. Third, I would point to my well-prepared, clearly-structured courses and lectures. Students have consistently reported that my teaching evinces a deep command of the material, and the flexibility to extend the readings/ideas with novel examples, or in different contexts, as well as handle student questions that demand a background knowledge well beyond the readings or exercises. Evaluations also affirm my intentional efforts to construct and communicate clear learning objectives and grading criteria for every course. Finally, my USF teaching portfolio gives pride of place to social justice, and also to environmental and animal justice. Understanding and extolling justice in these respects permeate my instruction.

In five years of teaching at USF, I believe I have helped enrich my students. I have conferred upon them an eagerness for philosophical curiosity and learning. I am very gratified that the Philosophy department has trusted me with students who may only engage with philosophy through our core courses. In this regard, I am confident to have represented my department with distinction. I hope to continue teaching for the Philosophy department, in the service of our students long into the future. Please accept my thanks to you, in advance, for considering my application for Preferred Hiring II at USF.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, either by email (smfriesen@usfca.edu) or by phone (812-361-4401).

Sincerely,
Stephen Friesen

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STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
Stephen Friesen, Ph.D.

In the Teaching Philosophy I developed for PHP I, I emphasized (i) my commitment to, and facility with, our diverse student population, (ii) my commitment to *social justice* by way of fostering critical thinking in a collective, socially intelligent class environment, (iii) the importance of intensive class preparation (on my part, and on the student's) and (iv) teaching in accordance with clear learning objectives. I continue to stand by these guiding themes. (And I have attached the PHP I Teaching Philosophy as Additional Materials 8, for your review.)

But since my placement in the PHP in August 2017, I have reflected on aspects of my teaching in need of further development and improvement. The Teaching Philosophy developed here - for PHP II - builds upon and refines the themes I articulated in 2017. In particular, I will outline three outcomes of my reflection which I think are important enough to belong in a new statement of my ever-evolving implementation of my Teaching Philosophy.

(1) *Transferability of Skills*. A new focus in my instruction has been to convey the transferability of the critical reading and writing skills I develop in my students. The student evaluations are helpful source of feedback in this endeavor, since question 2 in the Student Learning section asks students whether "Strategies for learning (learning how to learn) in this course are transferable to other subjects." My first teaching innovation since 2017 has been to sharpen students' awareness of the Transferability of their skills which we now relentlessly develop throughout the semester. In Fall 2016, the average student response for this question on the evaluation was 5.35. I have since spent considerable energy developing an approach to reading and critical evaluation that enables students to glean essential features from argumentative writing in non-fiction. For almost every class period, students are expected to come prepared for proposals concerning the authors' Project, Thesis and Argument Strategy (or "Method").

Since refining this reading and evaluation strategy, the scores for this question have improved appreciably in the Fall and Spring Semesters since my acceptance in the PHP (5.67, 5.78, 5.55, 5.59). As further qualitative evidence of the success of this approach's transferability, I will include here a sample from an unsolicited student email I received this summer (you can read the entirety of the message in Additional Materials 3a).



“With a decent amount of confidence I can say I have never learned more in 3 years of college than I did in your class. The reason for this is beyond the knowledge gained from the readings, which I consistently found engaging, but the fact that you taught us comprehension tools and reinforced them through diverse readings. The most notable tool, at least for me, was the P, T and M method.

Your class spawned a deep interest in environmental policy and ethics in me, so much so that I read my friend's textbook from a class she took in college titled "American Indian Environmental Ethics: An Ojibwa Case Study" and enjoyed it thoroughly. ... To be frank I hit somewhat of a roadblock when I reached the portion about the myths/tales of the Ojibwa people, mainly because I was uncomfortable with the writing style and thus was not really understanding the stories well. After reading the initial tales I thought back to the P, T, and M method, and after consciously utilizing the method I began to understand the stories far better and naturally enjoyed them more as well.

The fact that I have used the P, T, and M method on such an array of readings from your class and now for my leisure reading gives me loads of confidence/hope as not only an avid reader, but someone with hopes of becoming an environmental lawyer. I think if I continue using the method, by the time I have to start reading complex legal documents I will have exercised that organizational mental muscle so much that I will have a leg up on not just my contemporaries, but my former self.”

(2) *Student Engagement.* The second refinement in my teaching has been to fine-tune Student Engagement. Here too my quantitative scores have been consistently adequate (e.g. 5.53 in Fall 2016). At a closer glance, my scores for Student Engagement are consistently scored slightly lower than the other categories on student evaluations.

My department chair Marjolein Oele has been an invaluable source of observation and successful suggestions concerning student engagement. After conducting a teaching observation for the Philosophy Department in April 2019, Dr. Oele offered several constructive ideas to further engage my students. They included suggestions such as asking students write their P, T and Ms on group-specific whiteboards, having students read passages out loud in large and small groups, and even reading their homework assignments out loud. Dr. Oele had insightful ideas about room and small-group arrangements, such as arranging furniture to create ‘squares’ of 4 students to enhance their small group communication. She also wondered whether the use of a remote clickpad would give me more independence from the front of the room (i.e. from the lectern and projector controls).

I have since implemented Dr. Oele suggestions, and can tentatively affirm that they have been effective in promoting stronger student engagement. For instance, the suggestion to free myself from the lectern has certainly created more dynamism to my presentation. Becoming more mobile in the classroom means I can facilitate participation from anywhere in the room. Moreover, my enhanced mobility means I can step out of the way, as it were, in those special moments when the materials or content appear to move



students directly, as they do on occasions when they are asked to read powerful passages from the projector out loud.

To be honest, I have always enjoyed reading moving passages myself in front of the class. Speaking more generally, I just enjoy being in front of students and feel comfortable and natural there. Perhaps I have even felt that students could not be trusted to read important passages out loud; that their voice was not ready to convey those moments of the text that are especially salient and moving. To step back - *to step out of the way*, as it were - makes me uneasy, since it means relinquishing a measure of my role as a mediator and facilitator of sometimes difficult content; it means giving up a measure of control, and trusting my students in that space. However, in exercising this strategy I am beginning to appreciate how Student Engagement is more than *engagement with me*. In stepping away from my lectern at opportune moments, I can see how students also need to engage more directly with the text and its ideas.

Measurable improvement in long term patterns of Student Engagement may take some time to discern in student evaluations, since my scores there are still relatively high. However, it is worth mentioning that in my recent Summer section of 2019, Student Engagement averaged at 5.82 - which is among my highest evaluation scores in this category since 2014. Aside from the student evaluations, I have sensed a marked difference in the quality of small-group and large-group discussion by implementing Dr. Oele's suggestions. Students appear to me more engaged.

(3) *Technology*. The third dimension of development consists of having a constructive role for technology in the classroom. My former attitude about technology in the classroom was largely dismissive and exclusionary. In reflecting on my years of teaching service to USF, I came to see that the style and format of my classroom instruction was relatively traditional. So in the summer and fall of 2018, USF's Educational Technology Services (ETS) sponsored a three-day tech intensive program to introduce course design and instructional technologies to both full-time and adjunct faculty. Participation in the seminar gave me the opportunity to learn about educational technologies that addressed instructional challenges in my Environmental Ethics course. In Additional Materials 4, I provide greater specificity and examples of the ways technology has been constructively integrated into my teaching.

In summary, since my acceptance in the PHP I, my Teaching Philosophy has further evolved to emphasize the transferability of the skills students develop in class, to refine the way my instruction engages students, and to accept the centrality of technology in students' lives and to graft it viably with my classroom instruction.

In my teaching philosophy from 2017, I wrote that "*I should not fail to acknowledge my eagerness and openness to learn from, and adapt to, the pedagogical strategies of the many terrific full time and part time colleagues here at USF.*" The strength of my 2019 application for PHP II rests on my having made good on this promise. Both the



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consistency of my teaching excellence since 2014 as well as the early success in new and exciting pedagogical developments since 2017 would not have occurred if not for my reliance on USF's superlative faculty (e.g. Marjolein Oele), programs (e.g. the College of Arts and Sciences and the TDF) and services (e.g. Educational Technology Services).



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STATEMENT OF COLLEGIALITY

Stephen Friesen, Ph.D.

For me, supporting a collegial environment means preventing the professional distinctions between full-time and part-time faculty from fossilizing into social divisions. It also means that students strongly identify my person, and my teaching, with the department and with its program aims and outcomes. In still other words, collegially, to me, is about comporting myself in a manner that engenders my shared stake in the department, and the department's commitment to its students. Understood in this way, the quality of my collegiality can be evidenced by three recent examples of my proactive involvement with departmental and university activities.

First, I embrace my shared responsibility in the department's curricular and pedagogical themes and aims - far beyond my support of the department's program and learning outcomes. For example, I have been invited to present at our department's pedagogy workshop in the Spring (2020) semester, to share my initiative to prepare online modules for disaster-related class cancellations (see Additional Materials 5 for a fuller discussion). I have also been encouraged to consider ways in which my work might have wider significance as a disaster-preparation model in the College of Arts and Sciences. Here too I have expressed my willingness to continue developing my disaster-preparation strategy for wider application in the College.

Second, my participation in the ETS Tech Intensive Seminar (which I discuss further in the Additional Materials 4) also typifies my collegiality. This was a three day intensive training seminar, with participants from across Colleges, both full-time and part-time. Aside from my congenial and professional comportment at this multi-day event (see Reference Letter 2, which speaks directly to my tech intensive seminar participation), my participation in USF-sponsored teaching development opportunities illustrates my shared stake in USF's teaching mission.

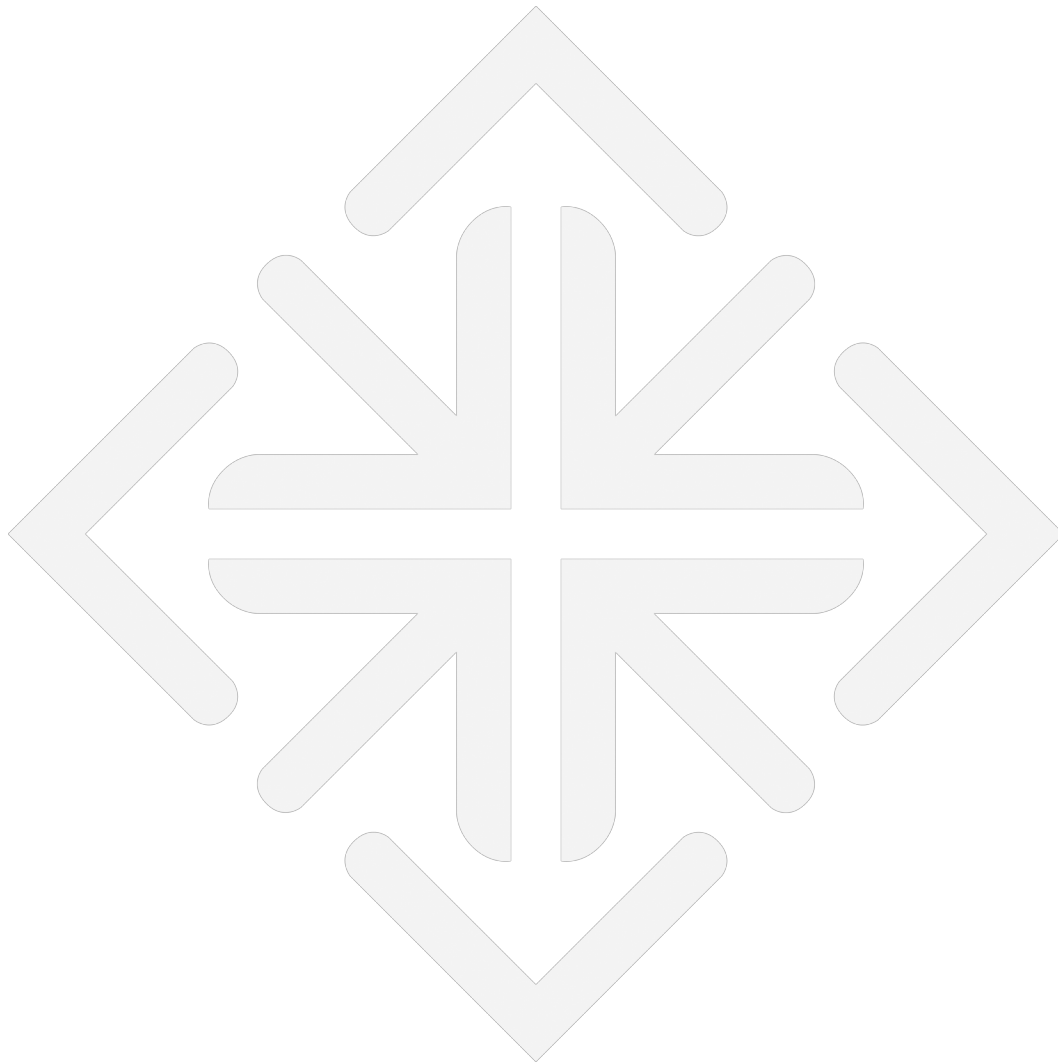
Finally, in recent years the Philosophy department has developed and implemented an office-sharing program between full-time and part-time faculty. From the very beginning I have been a willing participant in this program, and have shared office spaces with at least four full-time faculty members. This program demonstrates an impressive and reciprocal collegiality, and a real attempt to diminish the professional and social distinctions between full-time and part-time faculty. My enthusiastic participation in this



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program demonstrates my reciprocal commitment to bridge the gap: to comport myself in a manner of a true colleague to *all* the faculty of the Philosophy department.



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STATEMENT OF SUPPORT OF DEPARTMENTAL LEARNING OUTCOMES
Stephen Friesen, Ph.D.

I am applying for PHP II status for Environmental Ethics (PHIL 244), which is a D3 core courses. Departmental learning outcomes are explicitly recapitulated on the relevant syllabi, and I have made significant efforts - and achieved significant progress - in adapting the course experience to these outcomes.

Learning outcomes for PHIL 244 include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Identify and articulate central ethical problems concerning equality, justice, and rights, and understand the role these play in personal and professional life.
- Compare and contrast major ethical theories, to show how actions can be determined to be just or unjust, right or wrong, or good or bad, and to demonstrate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of major ethical theories.
- Think and write critically about classic and contemporary moral issues.

My commitment to teaching in accordance with Departmental learning objectives goes far beyond their mere presence on the syllabus. I share the view that teaching with clear learning outcomes is increasingly important in a diverse pedagogical climate. But I also think that teaching, properly aimed at learning outcomes, involves a conscientious and adaptive process. The fit between a curriculum and learning outcomes takes time, careful consideration and adaptation to constructive feedback. As I did in my Teaching Philosophy, I will provide one concrete example of the way my teaching has evolved to improve the fit between my curriculum and the foregoing core learning objectives.

I strive to develop critical thinking skills in my students, which accords with one of the listed learning outcomes above. This might seem like a necessary and obvious thing for a philosophy instructor to say, and for a Philosophy Department learning outcome to profess. In practice, achieving success in this learning objective is far from trivial. Of course, merely assessing for critical thinking is straightforward. It is not difficult to identify and reward students in the class who - for reasons apart from their course experience - have a stronger capacity for critical thinking. But how does one build a curriculum that improves *everyone's* critical thinking and writing skills, irrespective of their prior exposure to critical modes of thinking and practice?

USF's, and the Philosophy Department's emphasis on core learning outcomes has improved my teaching ability in this very respect. Upon joining the part time faculty, I



thought of my pedagogy along the following lines: critical thinking involves exposure to great philosophical ideas, intermittent assessment of student comprehension of those ideas, and an opportunity (near to, or at, the end of the semester) to practice critical writing about philosophical ideas. It is tempting to think that exposure to great thinkers and deep ideas automatically makes the consumer a stronger critical thinker. This is not so.

I have since changed my pedagogy for critical thinking, and the activities required to assess the ongoing development of my students' critical thinking skills throughout the course of the semester. In philosophy, assigning paper writing is a common way to assess critical thinking and critical writing. In my former teaching assignments at Indiana University, I would assign a critical paper due at the end of the semester. The Department's learning outcomes at USF have challenged me to reconsider how I might not only assess for, but improve upon, a student's critical writing skills. This has led me to change the structure of my writing assignments. In the place of the end-of-term critical paper, I presently assign two shorter critical papers; one due very early in the semester, and the other due late in the semester. This already doubles the opportunity to provide feedback for improved philosophical writing. But further, I require students to write a Research Task for each of the two papers, due several weeks before the respective final drafts are due. The Research Task requires students to read for comprehension some text I have selected, with guided questions to aid their comprehension of the material. This allows for feedback at a critical stage of their paper development. It allows me to ask whether a student has an adequate comprehension of the basic philosophical content upon which she must then apply her critical task. This added stage of assessment then allows an opportunity to level the field in terms of content comprehension. In turn, the feedback helps protect students from early mistakes, or misunderstandings that can easily ramify throughout the completed assignment.

Briefly put, this new critical writing program allows me to more precisely improve and assess students' critical writing, whilst giving every student a significantly greater (fourfold!) chance to receive the feedback necessary to succeed with respect to this particular learning outcome.

I hope the foregoing remarks and example conveys the serious reflection that I bring to our learning outcomes. The Philosophy Department can be assured of my ongoing support for, and improved implementation of our core learning outcomes.