

Code of Conduct for the Philosophy Department

September 2020

Let us begin with a simple reminder: staff members and students of Philosophy are united by their friendship with, and love for, wisdom. Wisdom is not something you possess once and for all, but something you desire and which you constantly have to pursue. At the same time, we must acknowledge that philosophy is an academic discipline and forms part of an institution that is – currently – structured in a hierarchical and competitive way. This structure encourages abuse, regularly puts the integrity of its members to the test and quietly favours uniformity instead of diversity. Moreover, the discipline of philosophy does not have a good reputation for cultural diversity. The principles below serve as a reminder of our ideals and to make us conscious of the stubborn reality.

Academic freedom and integrity

(1) Academic freedom is a fundamental precondition for research and education. This holds for philosophy as much as for any other academic discipline. Controversial views can be defended and mainstream views challenged. Academic staff and students have the freedom to present, research and argue for any philosophically interesting idea. Lecturers have the freedom to teach what they deem valuable – within the boundaries of philosophy broadly construed. It must also be possible to openly discuss texts with outdated viewpoints. Staff members and students are expected to defend their ideas in a responsible and balanced way. We always behave in accordance with the principles of academic integrity. In particular, we comply with the Regulations Governing Fraud and Plagiarism for UvA Students.

Equality and respect

(2) We are respectful, collegial and understanding towards everyone who works or studies with us. Respect is a basic precondition for collegiality. Being understanding and having empathy for others ('listening attentively', 'putting oneself in someone else's shoes') is the positive counterpart to this attitude. Respect for others entails, for instance, that we accept a wide range of opinions in conversation and discussion, do not personally criticise an opponent, and allow everyone to finish speaking.

(3) We do not discriminate on the basis of gender, religion, nationality, ethnic background, age, disability or other personal characteristics. We are sympathetic towards diversity and different outlooks.

(4) We actively strive towards a study and work environment that is inspiring and pleasant for everyone. We talk with each other instead of about each other: Gossip and generalised reproaches ("you are always...", "this group is always...") have no place in a desirable work environment. We ensure that neither staff members nor students feel intimidated or harassed: we do not initiate physical contact with others; we do not make sexual, racist or humiliating comments or 'jokes'; we do not exclude each other.

Inequality and responsibility

(5) We are aware of the existence of formal and informal power relations within the Philosophy Department. Anyone in a formal or informal position of power over another person has special responsibilities. This means that staff members may not enter into a sexual or romantic relationship with (former) students, PhD candidates or postdoctoral researchers for whom they have academic responsibility. The individual in a position of power must also ensure that any person in a subordinate position does not feel intimidated or harassed by them.

(6) We strive for a safe environment within the classroom. We welcome a plurality of outlooks and pay attention to how what we say may be construed, independently of how it is intended. We encourage participation within the classroom, paying special attention to the conversation dynamics.

Measures

(7) We take firm and appropriate corrective measures against anyone in the organisation who does not comply with this code of conduct.

(8) We strive to handle complaints in a way that protects the complainant from negative consequences.

Practical implementation:

To ensure that these rules of conduct become an integral part of the department's culture, they must be actively incorporated into everyday practice.

We propose the following:

- Present the code of conduct at the beginning of each academic year during the first meeting or gathering of the department.
- Present the code of conduct at the beginning of each semester during the first lectures and seminars.
- Have regular conversations with students and staff members in vulnerable positions in order to check the extent to which our ideals correspond with reality.