

February 2025

Dear Prospective Graduate Students,

It's wonderful that you're considering TMU for your graduate studies! I will be joining the Philosophy Department at TMU in July 2025. I work primarily in epistemology, and I have overlapping research interests in feminist and social philosophy.

Most of my research is on the epistemology of inquiry. To get a feel for some of the topics I work on consider the following. We are curious creatures in search of answers. We don't just sit back and relax, waiting for the evidence we need to come our way. Instead, we often take matters into our own hands: we actively seek out the evidence we need to answer the questions that matter to us. For instance, I suspect that you're engaged in an inquiry right now. Perhaps you're considering whether graduate school in philosophy is right for you, or you're wondering what it's like to study philosophy at TMU, or maybe you are curious about who this Arianna Falbo person is. In any event, I hope this letter will provide you with at least some of the evidence you need to successfully resolve your inquiry.

My research develops a framework for theorizing about the nature of inquiry, which centers upon the idea that inquiry aims at epistemic improvement, broadly construed. This view understands the aim of inquiry in a *pluralistic* way, as encompassing epistemic improvements which fall short of, and go beyond, coming to know the answer to a question. For example, consider a surgeon who is inquiring into the question of whether it's the left or the right kidney that she needs to remove. The surgeon may not only want to gain knowledge but *certainty* of the answer to her question. An epistemic improvement approach contrasts with popular views in the literature on which the aim of inquiry is knowledge. I argue that these views are overly narrow, and that an epistemic improvement approach can better explain the rationality of inquiry across a wider range of important and paradigmatic cases.

Here are some further questions that my research considers: What does it mean for inquiry to have an aim? Is the aim of inquiry like the aim of a game? When (if ever) is it irrational to inquire into a question? How should we understand the rationality of inquiry into very difficult or controversial questions, like the kinds of questions we investigate in philosophy? What is the relationship between inquiry and epistemology? Are epistemic norms also norms of inquiry—are they the norms we will follow when we're trying to learn and figure out the answers to our questions?

I also have related research interests in feminist and social epistemology. This strand of my research considers the dynamics of inquiry under conditions of epistemic injustice and oppression. Following Fricker (2007), there has been a steady stream of work on epistemic injustice, which highlights how one can be wronged in their capacity as a knower. This scholarship has drawn important attention to how prejudice and stereotypes can prevent one from being appropriately recognized as a credible informant or source of knowledge. However, discussions of epistemic injustice have tended to ignore inquiry, and the influence of prejudice in shaping the conditions under which knowledge is acquired in the first place. I am interested in investigating how common inquiring practices may function to sustain and reproduce unjust social arrangements.

Here are some of the topics that I've worked on: the nature and norms of inquiry, questions and interrogative speech acts, inquiring attitudes (e.g., suspended judgment, agnosticism, curiosity, wonder, and puzzlement), open-mindedness and dogmatism, meta-epistemology and the relationship between practical and epistemic rationality, higher-order evidence, games and gamification, epistemic

injustice and oppression, hermeneutical injustice, the semantics and pragmatics of slurs, as well as gaslighting and other forms of silencing. I would be excited to advise graduate students on any of these topics, however, I'm very open to working with students on other related areas, and I am eager to help students explore the questions and ideas that they are most passionate about.

You can find my published work on my [PhilPapers](#) profile, and further information is available on my website: www.arianafalbo.weebly.com.

I've taught courses in epistemology, feminist theory, critical thinking, and applied ethics. In the classroom, I aim to cultivate a learning environment that is rigorous, inclusive, and all around a fun space to be productively puzzled in. Philosophy is difficult, and it's normal to be perplexed by philosophical texts and arguments. However, doing philosophy alone, in silent confusion, makes it needlessly harder. In my classes, I work with students to create a collaborative atmosphere where everyone feels welcome to share their (half-baked) questions and ideas, and where we're collectively working together to understand challenging arguments.

Lastly, I will share a little bit about my own journey into philosophy. I was a first-generation college student, and while attending university was exciting, it was also an incredibly awkward and difficult time of personal and intellectual growth. I benefited tremendously from having supportive mentors early on as an undergraduate student. I wouldn't be doing philosophy today were it not for their support. I'm committed to making academic philosophy a friendly and inclusive space for a diverse range of philosophers, especially graduate students who may not always feel comfortable or confident in academic spaces, or who may be less familiar with many of the unspoken norms of professional philosophy or higher education more generally.

I hope this letter gives you a glimpse into the range of topics that I'm interested in, as well as some background about me as a philosopher and teacher. Please feel free to email me with any questions you might have—I'd love to hear from you!

Sincerely,

Arianna Falbo