Tyler Cardenas:

I intend to take my background in philosophy into anthropology and having studied philosophy has been so helpful. The amount of writing, at the most superficial level... The amount of writing alone that I've done has prepared me for the writing part of anthropology. But beyond that, it really depends on being able to become a neutral other to study a variety of different cultures, a variety of different peoples. So there's another one to add to the list, anthropology and philosophy to me seem very related.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

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And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend. The resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

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We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 4:

I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 5:

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly Pomona. Psychology major, English major.

Sun Ezzell:

I'm transforming part-time into full-time.

Dr Lori Walker:

Really like the time that we spend with Julie about how to write a CV and cover letter.

Christina Barsi:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC, but most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi Mt. SAC alumni and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell learning assistance faculty and professional learning academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast. If the subject of philosophy has ever been of interest to you, or you've wondered what the classes and pathway of philosophy might look like at Mt. SAC, then our guest student host Tyler Cardenas sits down with his enthusiastic professors, Andrea Diem and Lori Walker to expound on the many ways philosophy is not only fun and applicable as a career, but is also very much a part of the very fabric of our lives.

Tyler Cardenas:

Hello, thank you for tuning into the Magic Mountie Podcast. My name is Tyler Cardenas. I'm a student at Mt. San Antonio College, and I'll be the host for today. Today I'm joined by two wonderful philosophy professors at Mt. San Antonio College, Dr. Andrea Diem and Dr. Lori Walker. Dr. Andrew Diem is a professor of philosophy as well as the chair of the philosophy department. She received her PhD and MA from U C S B and her BA in psychology from U C S D. She has authored over 10 books and has spoken all over. And Dr. Lori, if you'd like to introduce yourself.

Dr Lori Walker:

Sure. Thank you, Tyler. My bachelor's degree was actually in business. I originally wanted to own tutoring clinics, and so I had a windy road myself. I also taught third grade at one time, but my master's and my doctor work originally were in psychology and education. And then I went back years to get a master's degree in philosophy, which is how I'm teaching philosophy now. So I'm teaching the critical thinking courses that we have within the philosophy department.

Tyler Cardenas:

Amazing. That's awesome. So right off the bat, I have a question for each of you and it's about the moment that you realized philosophy was what you would like to study and what you would like to teach.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Well, my background, as you mentioned, Tyler was originally in psychology with an emphasis in psycho biology and studying the brain and consciousness. And when I graduated from UC San Diego, I did that year gap where you're not going jumping back into school, you're just exploring what you want to do. And that's when I traveled the world and I came back to California saying, I want to study philosophy. I want to study philosophy and religion and ethics and all of those subjects having traveled around the world, I was exposed to so many different cultures and perspectives, and it cultivated in me this desire to study philosophy.

Dr Andrea Diem:

And so that's when I went to graduate school at Santa Barbara, received my masters and then came to Mt. SAC in my mid twenties and was teaching there, but finishing up my PhD and I cannot imagine a better program for me, philosophy just is perfect. It taps into critical thinking, analytical skills, reasoning. It just touches upon so much important aspects of human thinking. We study... I'm sure you're going to be asking questions about what we study, but we study cutting edge topics and philosophy. It's not simply topics about Plato and Socrates, even though they're super important and we relate to their ideas and connect them to our lives, but we study stuff like artificial intelligence and virtual reality and evolutionary biology and really important topics for the modern day mind as well.

Tyler Cardenas:

That's amazing.

Dr Lori Walker:

And if I may for myself, when I was teaching previously, I've been at Mount SAC for over 20 years and I was teaching subjects related to education. When I was looking to make a transition, the reason I wanted to go into philosophy is because what has really struck me in my conversations with students is they're wanting a way to be able to make better choices in their lives. And I'm looking at that from a personal perspective, but also from a larger life perspective. And I find that people are often struggling. It's interesting that Andrea mentioned psychology because I feel that psychology and philosophy are very interconnected with one another.

Dr Andrea Diem:

They're like sister subjects.

Dr Lori Walker:

Absolutely. So I find that students are often struggling with their attachments to things. Their emotional connections to whatever their cultural beliefs or their experience might have been in the past compared to what they might want to be doing in the future as they're moving on to this next stage in life. So looking at it from a personal perspective, but also a greater perspective about how they operate in the world, where they want to make a difference, what that even looks like for them, what they value.

Dr Lori Walker:

What I love about philosophy is, it is literally a way of helping someone understand how to be able to make better, more informed choices, and to be able to do that and recognize when someone's decision is based upon true reasoned, logical thinking and when it might be what I call an emotional speed bump. Something... A decision that was made because we've been connected to some ideas for so long. We haven't had an opportunity to be able to really think through what are the logical reasons why I hold the beliefs that I do. And this is an opportunity to sit and talk with people about serious subjects and be able to come up with these conclusions that we can take the... Not that we're taking the emotion out, but we can look at them from a reason perspective. I love that.

Dr Andrea Diem:

And also I noticed that as I'm teaching philosophy, and I'm exposing the students to ideas like existentialism or stoicism on these very profound, philosophical schools of thought, I've noticed that they connect with it and allows them to have like tools of how to get through their day.

Dr Lori Walker:

Yeah.

Dr Andrea Diem:

It gives them a way to manage their lives because they've never thought about that perspective before.

Dr Lori Walker:

I agree with that. Absolutely.

Tyler Cardenas:

That's definitely something that, for me, as a student, I experienced studying with you, Dr. Andrea.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Yeah. You were a fantastic student Tyler, by the way.

Tyler Cardenas:

And it's amazing how based on your responses, we can see how philosophy manages to thread together, the past, the present and the future, and really ground... Like each of you said, our daily lives in this rationality. So I'd like to go a little deeper into something that you mentioned, Dr. Lori, and about this day to day necessity, or this day to day viability of having a philosophical mindset. Could you go a little deeper into that?

Dr Lori Walker:

Absolutely. On a personal basis. I know with students often they're coming to me... Oftentimes wanting even personal opinions about what's going on in their lives or what experiences are, or what opinions that I have. And quite frankly, I'm careful not to offer those because I think it's important for people to come to conclusions themselves. And I think oftentimes they haven't been taught and they haven't had that experience rather. Most people, I think, have lived lives where others have found it their role to give opinions about what should be done versus someone being able to go through what I call a wise choice process to be able to come to a conclusion on their own. So what I love about critical thinking about philosophy is it gives them a structure for how to be able to come by up with conclusions on their own.

Dr Lori Walker:

And they're not my conclusions, they're their conclusions from their own reason decisions. There are a lot of things even going on this last year has been very interesting in critical thinking classes because oftentimes people have their beliefs about things based up upon again, whatever their past experiences may be. And I'm asking them... We were talking a lot about, for example, systemic racism or knowledge, like who gives knowledge, who gives knowledge value, where does that come from? Those are huge issues this year. And I always give them a process and I encourage them to be able to come up with logic, reasoned thoughts for why they're coming to those conclusions and that they can ultimately do that for themselves, regardless of what the situation that comes up, learning the ability to articulate that to someone else is also amazing.

Dr Lori Walker:

I used to watch students, even in just one class, make amazing shifts in coming from a very emotional stance in terms of how they make their decisions, to recognizing, being able to say, oh, but that's a fallacy. I just put a fallacy out there that didn't even make sense that wasn't even relevant. They're able to actually think through their process.

Dr Andrea Diem:

They recognize fallacies in their everyday world then as a result of studying that.

Dr Lori Walker:

Oh, absolutely.

Dr Andrea Diem:

It's amazing to have that light bulb go off.

Dr Lori Walker:

Absolutely.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Experiencing the world. Yeah. So I also noticed philosophy really helps with interpersonal relationships and that... If we're talking about how it impacts day to day lives, it allows us to have a multiple perspective and see different viewpoints than our own viewpoint. And so Tyler, you remember you took my world religions class and we studied Jainism. And I remember you connected very nicely with that philosophy and Buddhism and all those other wonderful philosophies from the east. In Jainism, they teach this philosophy of anekantavada and it's like my mantra, so to speak or my motto. And it's this idea of multiple perspectives that we should always be willing and able to step into the shoes of somebody else and see their worldview.

Dr Andrea Diem:

That's what philosophy really teaches you, to have that larger, wiser perspective and to be able to connect with people because of that. It's an enriched philosophy that we can take into our everyday lives and not... Philosophy isn't just about book learning. It's not just about what these old guys said 3000 years ago, it's extremely relevant and radically impacts as Lori saying how we see the world, how we interact with people. It impacts our whole outlook on life. And so it's a subject matter that I think everybody should study definitely for an AAT we're going to argue that in a few minutes, but even just one philosophy class, one philosophy class can be life changing.

Tyler Cardenas:

Wow. It's so crucial in times like these, right, where there's so much polarization and so many willing to offer to us how we should think and how we should live out certain things, but to be able to work through those on their own, like Dr. Lori was saying is so powerful. And that's absolutely something that I experienced studying specifically ethics with you, Dr. Andrea, I found myself feeling like I knew how I felt about the topics that we went over. And every time it was time to write about it, I had to really confront myself and say, wow, now this is the way I thought I felt. But now that I have all the facts from both sides in front of me.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Yeah. Oh yeah. You see it from a different perspective.

Tyler Cardenas:

It can be jarring because you wonder has my thinking been flawed? Have I been ignorant? And it really is eyeopening, like you said.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Yeah. And the ethics class, we study a lot of very temporary topics like animal welfare. I remember you connected very nicely with that. We study environmentalism, we study brain research and consciousness and narrow ethics. Again, I'm trying to relay that these topics are very relevant, very current, very cutting edge and topics that I think students would find fascinating. I just don't think they know about it. I don't think they realize how amazing philosophy is as a subject to study.

Dr Lori Walker:

If I can just add to that. I agree because I mentioned to you when I had done my graduate work in philosophy, it was fascinating because I was expecting it to focus really on Plato, Socrates, et cetera. And a lot of it was things like AI, artificial consciousness, and looking at the ethics of that, where we're going with that. And there's so many degrees now that actually combine computer science and philosophy because we're looking for philosophy to be able to answer the questions about what are the ethics of artificial intelligence? What's the ethics of the experience of living as a society with robots, et cetera? What does that mean for us? Philosophy is the area that answers those questions.

Dr Andrea Diem:

So it's not just about the past, and it's not just about the present. It's also about the future. We study futuristic topics. And scientists like Michio Kaku says we need to look at the ethics involved with artificial intelligence and creating artificial consciousness and so forth, super intelligence. So there's definitely a blending of computer science and technology and philosophy. It is a modern day topic and a futuristic topic as well.

Tyler Cardenas:

Where might a student take this knowledge?

Dr Lori Walker:

There are actually many different areas. I will say that there are a number of philosophy students that go on to graduate school. And we may talk about that later on, but often too, philosophy is considered the ultimate transferable work skill. And the reason for that is because we're looking at skills that are in such high demand, the things in light, the ability to think through things in a reason process, and to be able to come up with logical conclusions, that itself is huge.

Dr Andrea Diem:

It's problem solving. I mean, you're-

Dr Lori Walker:

Absolutely.

Dr Andrea Diem:

The skill is problem solving. The skill is critical thinking the skill is analytical thinking, oral and written communication. So you're learning so much from philosophy and these are skills that the workforce wants and needs. So you could be highly marketable as a result of a philosophy degree.

Dr Lori Walker:

And something you said earlier too, about your ethics class, the ability to look at things from multiple perspectives.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Yes.

Dr Lori Walker:

That's something that we desperately need.

Dr Andrea Diem:

See both sides or three or four sides even. Multiple perspectives. And so that also... I always argue that being able to do that helps with our human relationships, because you can understand where somebody else is coming from.

Dr Lori Walker:

Oh absolutely. You see philosophy majors in a range of different jobs, et cetera, as well. We're looking at people going into law. We're also looking at people going into religious studies, right? Because those are skills that we can use in both of those areas. Or even as you said, there's a great deal of writing involved. So people going into journalism, for example.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Journalism's a big one.

Dr Lori Walker:

Marketing.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Education.

Dr Lori Walker:

Education is a huge one.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Absolutely not just... And I don't just mean professors, which of course would be wonderful, but any area of education, it could even be a principal of a high school. Education at any level K through 12 or college. One thing a lot of people don't realize is it's also a fantastic area to study for medicine. And you think well, why medicine? Well, first of all, let's talk about nurses and then we could talk about doctors, but for nurses, a lot of the nursing programs require them to take some of our courses, specifically ethics. And sometimes world religions is required but ethics for sure. They want them to have that background as they're entering the medical field, but for potential future doctors, when they're getting ready to take the MCATs I've heard about a third of the MCAT focuses on logic and critical thinking and having a philosophy background, they score much higher on those exams as they do, not just with the MCAT, but also with the LSAT and the GRE.

Dr Andrea Diem:

So we're talking about test score. You're talking about a practical reason to take philosophy. Your test scores will go at a much higher level and it will help you in your applications to medical school. I've understood that a lot of medical programs love philosophy students. You think, well, no, they want biology. As long as you've taken the biology courses, but you have maybe a bachelor's degree in philosophy or an AAT in philosophy. That looks like a good thing for them because they see a very well rounded, a very intelligent, why is doctor in the future? And not, somebody's just only focused on one thing.

Tyler Cardenas:

This is something that I can relate to as I intend to take my background in philosophy into anthropology and having studied philosophy has been so helpful. The amount of writing at the most superficial level, the amount of writing alone that I've done has prepared me for the writing part of anthropology. But beyond that, it really depends on being able to become a neutral other to study a variety of different cultures, a variety of different peoples. So there's another one to add to the list, anthropology and philosophy to me seem very related.

Dr Andrea Diem:

And we have a world religions course in our program. And I always tell the students, this is like an anthropology course. It's a cultural anthropology course. A lot of times they sign up and think, oh, I don't believe in God, or I believe in God and they think it's about God. It's not a theology course. It's a cultural anthropology course where we're studying different cultures and philosophies and worldviews and how these ideas developed in history. And we place them in historical context. It's kind of a combo of a history class and cultural anthropology course. So I would think, and that's the course you took with me, Tyler on campus.

Tyler Cardenas:

Yes.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Pre pandemic. That's a course that I think would probably have helped your career as an anthropologist.

Tyler Cardenas:

Of course.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Do you think so? I'm putting much in your mouth, but I hope that's the case.

Tyler Cardenas:

I was even going to say, I think the first field work I may have ever done was in your class going to a mosque, going to a-

Dr Andrea Diem:

And you went to a Buddhist temple.

Tyler Cardenas:

Correct.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Yes. And you did amazing.

Tyler Cardenas:

And a Hindu temple as well.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Oh wow. I only required two and you did three. There you go. Extra credit.

Tyler Cardenas:

So I of course grew up here in the states and have really only been exposed to the Judeo-Christian tradition that is so common in the west. And like you mentioned earlier, Dr. Andrea having taking the world religions course and studied the east was completely eye opening. I had no idea that on the most basic level that there were these other religions that were so large and then learning how related they are in contrast with how separated some of the Western religions are, was very eye opening. Almost like religious tolerance is built in to the east, which I really appreciated. And as I'm sure you noticed, I took a great interest in.

Tyler Cardenas:

That was amazing. And then going to several actual places of worship for some of these other traditions was super humbling experience. Sitting down and talking to Buddhist, sitting down and talking to Hindus and Muslims was a totally humbling experience. I have the utmost respect now for every religious tradition. I can see how everyone is sacred and how each of them has the most devout followers and the best people that exist in each of those traditions.

Dr Lori Walker:

Very nice. I'm glad that course gave you that feeling. Tyler. It's great.

Tyler Cardenas:

So we talked about how philosophy became each of your paths, maybe how education followed from studying philosophy.

Dr Andrea Diem:

As I was pursuing my master's degree and you're in graduate school and then eventually my PhD, they give you TA ships. They give you your own class. It's part of your graduate program. You actually get paid, you teach your set of students each week. And so that was my first exposure to teaching. And I absolutely fell in love with teaching as a result of that. I just loved connecting with the students. I couldn't believe I got paid to do that. It was like, I'm having so much fun and yet I'm getting money from this. And then from there just like Lori taught third grade, which I didn't realize I taught high school. I taught ninth and tenth grade. And I taught actually at a private school.

Dr Andrea Diem:

You don't need... If you teach at a private school, a degree in education, so you just need your master's degree. And so I had my master's and I taught my first year in high school. At a public school, you would need the degree in education, but then I transitioned to there to Mt. SAC. And again, at Mount SAC, you don't need a degree in education. As long as you have that graduate degree. So while working at Mt. SAC, and it was probably four years in working at Mt. SAC that I finished my PhD while working there. Lot of stress, double dipping into those two things, but it was well worth it.

Dr Lori Walker:

I learned something about you, Andrea. I did not know.

Dr Andrea Diem:

That I taught high school?

Dr Lori Walker:

Yeah.

Dr Andrea Diem:

I didn't know you taught third grade. That's great.

Dr Lori Walker:

Teaching. I actually started in undergrad. I was asked to be able to help out with some classes I had already finished my English classes and such. I had some professors ask if I would come back and work with them. Then through just a fascinating connection, there was a program on campus that connected with the K through 12 system in the area. And there were many, many parents who wanted private tutoring for their students or their children rather. And so I was asked one summer if I was interested in doing that. And I thought, sure, tutor a couple kids. Why not? And I was given over a hundred names.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Oh my goodness.

Dr Lori Walker:

Yeah. I had no idea. And so I ended up actually setting up a business through that process. And what I recognized was I knew I could break things down in a way that people could genuinely understand them, even just the basic ideas in math, et cetera. I would find a way to look at a textbook and say, I'm not sure how a child would understand that. And so I would break it down for them in my mind's way of understanding it. And they would be able to start processing. So as I moved on, I knew that that was something that was my strength. And I found that throughout my career... It's really more than a career, it's a very personal journey and a very personal gift to be able to walk through this experience with my students, because I feel like they could be anywhere in the world and for whatever reason in this will world and this experience, there's this period of time where they choose to spend some time with me in this experience.

Dr Lori Walker:

And I love that. I love seeing that aha moment. I love it when they actually say, oh, I got it. Or I see them think through something differently as a result of an experience we had in a class. And I've had so many students come back and say, you know what, that right there, that actually changed my life. I do this differently. Or I do this now as a result of that experience, I'm very thankful. And same thing that Andrea said, I'm amazed I get to do this every day.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Yes. I mean philosophy is ground in this concept of eudemonia and eudemonia is like flourishing and living well. Some people translate as happiness. So it's really a discipline to get us to be the best we can be as human beings and to be happy, well balanced individuals. It's kind of like what greater field can you get into a subject matter that teaches us how to be better at what we are as human beings. And I've had those aha moments as well. Lori, I had a student... I teach a lot of honors classes, Mt. SAC, and the philosophy program has a lot of honors offerings. And I've had a lot of students very stressed and put a lot of pressure. And it's probably, they put the pressure on themselves. Their family puts the pressure on them society does, they got to get into good schools. They have all that pressure.

Dr Andrea Diem:

And Tyler, you're an honors' student, you know that going in that we're talking about highly motivated students. And then I teach them a philosophy. Like I mentioned earlier, stoicism that you just got to let... You do your best, but then you just let go and let things evolve as they will, because you can't control everything.

Dr Andrea Diem:

So you have to have that stress free tranquil mindset and let things unfold, but again, with your best foot forward. And that's like, oh my gosh, I've never thought of the world that way. I've transformed my thinking. And they just feel this weight lifted off their shoulders. And that is so rewarding to witness that. That's that aha moment as well lori.

Dr Lori Walker:

Exactly. And I too, I love the idea of helping someone understand that they actually... They do have those answers inside of themselves. I think oftentimes what we don't do is provide a space for people to be able to find those answers within themselves. And that's something that I feel that philosophy is able to do. We're able to simply provide a space and a structure and allow them to be able to come to their own decisions. I love that.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Absolutely. And also we have a lot of science minded students and I think they think of philosophy and science is like diametrically opposed, and they don't realize that so much of what we cover in our classes is grounded in science. And we utilize a scientific method to gain knowledge of the world. And we study, as I mentioned earlier, quantum theory and virtual reality and artificial intelligence and neuro science and just the cosmos itself. We ground a lot of our research in a scientific perspective. So I think that's a subject matter that should be appealing to a wide variety of audience and not just what we call the philosophy students. Definitely the scientific minded as well.

Dr Lori Walker:

Let me be clear too, Logic is highly mathematical.

Dr Andrea Diem:

Absolutely. We've got the math angle, we've got the science angle we've got-

Dr Lori Walker:

Yes.

Dr Andrea Diem:

And philosophy, the PhD... I always tell the students this the first day, because I always think it's so cool. The PhD stands for a doctorate in philosophy. That's the original discipline on this planet earth is philosophy and out of that merges all those other disciplines, which are great too, but it's, it starts with the root of philosophy.

Tyler Cardenas:

Wow. I hope that all of my future educators are trained in philosophy. This sounds wonderful. So we have about five minutes left and you mentioned a couple of the topics Dr. Andrea, but I'd like to hear from Dr. Lori as well. My question is why study philosophy at Mt. SAC in AAT program?

Dr Lori Walker:

Actually Andrea and her husband, David Lane, who is one of our faculty members in philosophy as well.

Dr Andrea Diem:

My husband.

Dr Lori Walker:

Yes. David has to be husband [crosstalk 00:29:29]

Dr Andrea Diem:

Yeah. That's an important side note. Sorry.

Dr Lori Walker:

Well because they have really honestly done some amazing things that are unique to Mt. SAC that no other... not that other community colleges aren't good, but that no other community college has done. And that is the number of books that have been published. The number of audio books, et cetera, that have been published. The numbers are incredible on-

Dr Andrea Diem:

So the numbers are about 500 original philosophy books and some of them are copies of maybe Plato's writings and Nietzsche's writings, but a lot of them are original as well. Then there's about 200 audible.com or audiobooks. And there's about 100 films that have been created. Lori you're right, that sets Mt. SAC's philosophy program on the map is one of the most unique programs. And I'm going to stretch it here in the world. I know that sounds like, okay, in California, I'm actually going to say the planet earth. I don't know if any other community college that has a publishing house like that and a film production house like that. And some of the times the students are themselves published. So Tyler, let's talk about your publication through our program.

Tyler Cardenas:

I did have the privilege in-

Dr Andrea Diem:

You have two publications, is that right? You were published in not only a book, but also it was put on a website in Europe. Is that correct?

Tyler Cardenas:

Yes, that is-

Dr Andrea Diem:

So we also have our students being published. So if you're part of our program, there's an opportunity to be doing research. There's an opportunity to be published and add that to your resume and build your career as well that way. Lori, thank you for pointing that out. That is something that should definitely explain to one of the reasons why we stand out at our program and then the AAT itself, you need to take six philosophy classes for the AAT we offer eight, we recommend eight but six to get that degree. And from there, students are guaranteed acceptance into Cal State or given priority registration into UC. And most of the students who major in philosophy who apply to UC do get in, because it's not an impacted field, even though I think it should be, but there's a lot of room for growth in going into those areas and transferring there.

Christina Barsi:

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. And don't forget to share your favorite episodes.