Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Philosophy is hard. But by encountering unfamiliar and *exciting* ideas and learning how to assess them, students' views about themselves, the world, and their place in it can become better justified and their lives can become richer. For this to happen, students must actively engage with these ideas and work toward mastering challenging skills.

To facilitate students' active engagement with difficult ideas, I often design my courses with a narrative that I use to illustrate how the topics we discuss fit together. I also consciously design courses in such a way that students are forced to engage with the ideas, with each other, and with me while developing their philosophical skills.

Organizing my courses around a narrative in which one part of the course naturally flows into the next helps students to see how the specific issues we explore together are part of a larger whole. For instance, one course I teach focuses on the nature of human persons. As students soon discover, exploring this requires delving into many different topics, including personal ontology, free will, and personal identity. Organizing our inquiry in this way shows students how larger problems can be broken into smaller ones. Furthermore, students come to appreciate how views about one topic need to cohere with views about another. In this way, students practice forming and revising their beliefs, and they develop sensitivities to how philosophical concerns might bear on one another. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, students come to see themselves as inquirers engaged in a larger project.

Philosophy is a *collaborative* inquiry in my classes. I try to exemplify this in my own conduct both inside and outside of the classroom. For instance, I regularly e-mail the class and discuss their contributions in more detail than time in class might allow us to; my goals here are to show what it is to take one another's contributions seriously and to model how to productively continue discussion outside of the classroom.

Second, I emphasize active learning in all of my classes. Sometimes this takes the form of presentations and small group discussion. In a typical activity of this kind, I divide the class into groups, each of which is assigned with developing a short presentation on a section of a paper we've read. These are highly structured activities in which I identify specific questions that I want students to answer about the reading and to present their findings on. Some of these questions are designed to make sure that students are taking away the main ideas of the text: *what is Olson's argument against constitutionalism on page four of the text?* Others, however, are more open-ended and designed to have students reflect on the meaning of the text and its import, like the following: *animalism says that human persons are numerically identical to human animals; do you think this is this consistent with there being anything special about human persons compared to other animals?* All of the questions serve the purpose of having students practice developing and defending their views in conversation. When group work is finished, the groups take turns presenting their findings and fielding questions from their classmates as I facilitate the discussion. This approach enables students to take ownership of their learning: they are responsible for answering questions, determining what they think about the material, presenting it to one another, and responding to one another's ideas.

Like any other kind of skill, developing *philosophical* skills requires practice. I develop daily activities to help students develop these skills. A typical day in the classroom begins with a short activity to get students to reflect on larger themes of the class and the reading or assignment for that day. Often, I ask students to write down what they took to be the most important point of the reading or assignment and something they're confused about or want to know more about. I then have

students discuss their answers with their neighbor. After a few moments, we reconvene and I ask students to share what they discussed. This is a low-stakes activity that gets students to actively recall what they're learning and to become comfortable with talking to one another and saying what is on their mind. It also helps them to develop an extremely important skill, viz. identifying what they don't know.

Ideally, students need to practice philosophical skills *outside* of the classroom, as well. To this end, I design out-of-class activities to help students practice using the tools we use in the classroom. For instance, my courses typically include a series of short writing assignments in which students are asked to perform increasingly difficult tasks in writing philosophy. In introductory-level courses, for instance, I have students begin by reconstructing an argument from a given text. In the second short writing assignment, they identify where one of the philosophers we're reading objects to the argument. In the third, they are tasked with responding to the objection. These assignments are introduced in tandem with discussion and examples of what good objections and responses look like in philosophical writing.

Finally, my approach to teaching involves a commitment to becoming a more effective educator. To that end, I am on the lookout for new strategies to employ both inside and outside of the classroom to help students develop as thinkers. This year, I am especially excited about two different strategies I'm employing in classes.

First, over the last few semesters of teaching logic, I have been experimenting with having a large number of optional, ungraded practice quizzes available for students to take outside of class. Students can take these online, and they are automatically marked. Each is accompanied by explanations of why answers are right or wrong that are immediately available upon completing the quiz. So far, students seem to appreciate these, and I suspect that students who take these tend to have better learning outcomes than those who do not. I'm interested in gathering more data on this.

Second, on the recommendation of other teachers, I am incorporating journaling into some of my classes this semester. One goal is to give students even more opportunities for low-stakes writing where they can try ideas out and practice thinking things through. A second goal is to give students opportunities to be mindful of what they're doing in class. For instance, in their first journal entry, I ask students to reflect on why they're taking the course and what they hope to accomplish in it; I then ask them to write a few lines about how they will work toward accomplishing those goals. A third goal is to have students connect the material we discuss in class to their own lives in ways that they might be uncomfortable doing in front of their peers. As an example, in my introduction to philosophy course, I ask students to think about moral arguments and their effects on action. Students respond to the following prompt: *Has an argument for some moral claim ever changed what you believe you ought to do but not how you act? Does this make sense? Will you change in response to Mozi's and Singer's arguments? Why or why not? What do you think they'd say in response?*

The things we do in my philosophy courses are *hard*, but they are extremely rewarding and exciting. I help students see that this is the case by designing courses, activities, and assignments that clarify difficult ideas; training students to develop and use difficult skills; and showing students how they can participate in ongoing conversations about some very cool topics.

Statement on Diversity, Inclusivity, and Equity

People of diverse backgrounds face roadblocks to inclusion and equitable treatment in the academic community. I am committed to making higher education work well for everyone by promoting values of diversity, inclusion, and equity in the classroom; in my interpersonal relationships; and in my own ongoing learning and professional development as a teacher and scholar.

In the classroom, I aspire to model a commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity. I believe that this requires practicing *awareness of*, *openness to*, and *care for* students' diverse identities, experiences and concerns, and accessibility to the classroom.

Many of my students have been people of color, veterans, non-traditional students with jobs, students from foreign countries, or students with disabilities. As I understand it, one of my responsibilities as a teacher is to make the classroom a space that is accessible to students with diverse backgrounds like these.

Research suggest that one thing that increases inclusivity and equity in diverse classrooms is incorporating more *structure* into course design. Something that promotes the relevant sort of structure is to create activities that *guide* students' engagement with material.

One way that I incorporate this structure in the classroom is by using *active learning* techniques. Sometimes, this is as simple as starting a class with a *think-pair-share* activity in which students are first asked to reflect on a prompt or answer a question, to talk with a partner, and then to share what they talked about. Other times, active learning in my courses takes the form of questions that students are given *prior* to class to direct their engagement with the material.

Furthermore, I aim to inspire and engage a wider range of my students by diversifying my course materials. I find that one excellent way of doing this involves putting philosophical traditions in conversation. Oftentimes, this creates an interesting grouping of readings. For instance, I often pair Peter Unger's arguments against the existence of the self with Buddhist texts in translation, such as excerpts from *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.66–8 in which the Buddha argues that there is no persisting self. Additionally, I am trying to be mindful of the authors I put on my syllabus; I hope to show all of my students that people like them are philosophers.

In my interpersonal relationships, I strive to recognize that students, colleagues, and staff come from many different backgrounds with a variety of intersecting identities and that they are situated to offer valuable viewpoints that I and others may not have considered and that I may not be in an ideal epistemic position to recognize. I try to remain cognizant of the valuable viewpoints that my students and colleagues offer; this requires that I cultivate and maintain habits of openness to others' perspectives, recognition that I am not always in a position to recognize problematic behaviors of myself and of others, and a willingness to listen to others' lived experiences and expertise.

In my ongoing learning and professional development, I am interested in further exploring ways in which I can become a more effective teacher, colleague, and ally for fellow members of our academic community. This takes two main forms. First, I have a professional interest in continuing to learn about how to create and inclusive and equitable classroom and becoming an inclusive educator. This includes learning techniques of inclusive pedagogy and continuing to foster an environment of respect, inclusion, and equity in the classroom. Second, I have a research interest in the metaphysics of race and gender, having presented on the topic at conferences and incorporated these interests into courses I have taught and am teaching this year. In spring 2020, I am teaching a writing course on the ontology of race, gender, and disability as part of Denison's college writing program. I would be excited to continue to incorporate these topics into future course offerings.

Structural forces preclude people of diverse backgrounds from full participation and inclusion in higher education. Because these are structural problems, we have to solve them as a community; I look forward to working together to promote diversity, inclusivity, and equity in both the classroom and academic community.

Developing as a Teacher

I think of my own development as a teacher in the same way I think of learning more generally: it is an ongoing process of self-improvement. My commitment to developing as a teacher takes three forms. First, I seek feedback from students. Second, I seek feedback, advice, and collaboration from colleagues. Finally, I pursue additional training in pedagogy.

One's sense of how things are going from the "front" of the classroom doesn't always match what students are experiencing. Because of this, it is important to seek out and incorporate feedback from students. I use this feedback to adjust aspects of my teaching. The most dramatic example of how this affected my teaching is from early in my teaching career. On the basis of feedback at the mid-point and end of courses, it became apparent that many students didn't enjoy or learn well from the lecture-heavy instruction that I liked most as an undergraduate and that I was using in my courses. As a result of this feedback, I sought out advice from colleagues on alternative ways of organizing students' classroom experience. My primary means of instruction is no longer lecture. Instead, I learned how to design courses with an eye toward promoting student's active engagement with the course material, with one another, and with me as a teacher. This has not only made teaching more rewarding, but it also seems to have made a wider range of my students enjoy class more and work with the ideas in deeper ways.

In logic courses, I am especially keen to give students ample opportunities to reflect on their own experience in the course and to offer me feedback based on that reflection. The reason I do this is because, if something isn't working for a student, then things can quickly spiral out of control given the nature of logic courses, in particular. I solicit feedback through short, weekly surveys. In these, I ask students about what worked well for their learning that week; what didn't work well; and what, if anything, they're still confused about. Using these, I can keep track of general trends in students' sense of the instruction, setup, and assessment of the course. Most importantly, this information allows me to follow up with *individual* students to address concerns and problems. After sorting through feedback from students, I take time in class to address that feedback and identify what I will do in response. By doing this, my students come to feel that they are collaborating with me, that their voices are heard, and that they have an ownership stake in what happens in the classroom.

Another way that I improve as an educator is by seeking feedback and advice from colleagues and by working with them to identify and implement best practices for teaching and advising.

My colleagues are knowledgeable and experienced teachers, and I ask them to evaluate my teaching. Fellow teachers can spot areas in which I can improve that students perhaps haven't noticed or haven't been able to explain to me when I seek their feedback. For instance, after one of my first evaluations, a colleague noted that explanations I gave were not as "punchy" as they could be. In conversation, it emerged that at least part of the problem was a lack of confidence in the classroom. I am now more mindful of the amount of confidence that I project in the classroom. Partly, this comes just with being more comfortable with teaching, but I also thought it had something to do with preparation. I now often *write out* explanations of particular problems and examples that I will talk about in class as a part of preparing for class; I find that this increases the clarity and conciseness of examples and explanations as well as increasing the confidence I project.

Because I have benefitted so much from my colleagues' commitment to improving my teaching, I also try to help them become better teachers. In spring 2019, along with Professor Declan Smithies and a few graduate students at The Ohio State University, I wrote a grant proposal to support professional development opportunities for the department of philosophy's instructors. The application sought funding for a series of aimed at creating a teaching community. First, excellent

teachers who are experienced in teaching particular courses would be asked to present about their experiences and the practices they've developed in teaching their classes. Second, we would have representatives from Ohio State's University Institute for Teaching and Learning lead workshops on different teaching methods. I am pleased to report that the grant application was successful. I hope to participate in and help to organize similar teaching communities in the future.

Finally, I am committed to becoming a better teacher by continuing my own education in pedagogy. While at Ohio State, I attended programs offered by Ohio State's University Center for the Advancement of Teaching and its University Institute for Teaching and Learning on topics like teaching critical thinking and creating assignments to promote desired learning outcomes. These changed the way that I design my courses. For instance, the two programs just mentioned helped me to rethink the way I teach fallacies: making students better reasoners isn't a matter of giving them a Latin vocabulary to describe fallacies, but giving them the skills to recognize mistakes in reasoning and distinguish them from similar patterns of reasoning that *aren't* fallacious. For instance, when teaching fallacies I emphasize how certain background facts affect whether a bit of reasoning is a fallacy. Things that might look like hasty generalizations in one context aren't in others: asking ten people at LAX where they're travelling to, finding that most of them are going to Aruba, and inferring that it is probably the case that most folks at LAX are travelling to Aruba is a different thing than asking ten people in the parking lot of the Superbowl where they're going, finding that most of them are going to the Superbowl, and inferring that it is probably the case that most people in the parking lot are going to the Superbowl. My goal is for students to recognize and be able to describe the relevant differences in cases like these.

This spring, I am excited to teach a writing course I've designed about the ontology of personal identity, gender, race, and disability. As a writing course, much of the instruction will focus on developing students' skills to not only accurately and charitably summarize and respond to ideas, but also to contribute to the conversation around these ideas in new ways. I look forward to the chance to improve my writing pedagogy through workshops organized by Denison. Additionally, I am excited to try out some ideas for developing a longer course on personal identity, gender, and race.