Teaching Philosophy Statement

My three goals in teaching are to create experiences that allow learners to (1) see relations between the material and their own lives, (2) engage with their peers in constructive discussion by recognizing themselves and their peers as contributors with valuable perspectives, and (3) identify applications for philosophical skills beyond the philosophy classroom and beyond the academy.

Experiential Learning: My first goal in teaching is to create experiences that allow students to recognize the relationship between the material and their lives. This makes it easier for students to engage with and understand material as they can situate it relation to their own experiences. I do this by providing learners with the opportunity to create their own learning experiences, learn from reflection on these experiences, and learn from the reflections of others. One way I achieve this is through the use of game-based learning activities. Active reflection on the experience of playing a game not only helps to structure and scaffold learning, but allows students to practice connecting philosophical material to their experiences. Philosophy of science is an area where this approach is especially useful. Consider that engaging with debates in the philosophy of science requires a basic understanding of a variety of sciences, and familiarity with the practice of science itself. Moreover, this is background that many students do not have. To address this challenge, I developed a game-based activity to introduce basic concepts in philosophy of science.

The activity is a game designed to roughly simulate scientific investigation and create examples through experience that can be described by theories and concepts from philosophy of science. The game requires players to identify the rules of a game from photographs and written records of the game being played. This creates an experience that is analogous to the practice of science. Since I control the parameters of the game, that is the rules and components players interact with, I can ensure that the play experience creates situations that reflect the concepts and theories we are learning about. The activity can be adapted to emphasize different concepts and features of scientific practice. For example, the written records and photographs can be prepared so that a variety of conflicting rule proposals are consistent with them. This provides a starting point for discussing the underdetermination of theory by evidence, which is when competing theories are consistent with all available evidence. After playing the game, students individually and collectively reflect on and discuss their experience. This activity structures student learning around the reflection and discussion of a shared learning experience. Additionally, students who are not familiar with the details of scientific practice are able to more readily grasp concepts and theories that describe those practices by reflection on the game experience which is not laden with difficult and distracting details about specific sciences.

Constructive Engagement: The second goal of my teaching is investing students with an awareness of their community and a sense and respect for their own and others perspectives. I use self and peer evaluation to encourage students to identify, acknowledge and embrace their

role as both individuals and members of a community. I do this through the use of self-assessment, peer-assessment, group discussion and by providing students with the opportunity to choose their own path towards the learning outcomes of the course. This is reflected in my approach to student participation. I encourage students to participate by whatever modes best fit for themselves, and provide examples of a variety of diverse modes of participation. Students then evaluate their own level of participation by preparing a short paper outlining how they engaged with the course, material and peers. This approach to participation requires students to actively and continuously reflect on how their engagement with their peers and with the course material has helped or hindered their learning.

Philosophical Skills: Finally, my third goal is to help students to build skills and knowledge that are useful beyond the philosophy classroom. As an example of this, when preparing the content of a tutorial for a class of first year students, I designed several meetings around basic skills that would be useful for the rest of their academic careers. We began by discussing how to read philosophy, take effective notes and participate in collaborative discussions. Midway through the term I introduced students to the concept and theory of metacognition, and then had them apply those principles to their own learning throughout the remaining tutorials. Students reflected on the basic skills they learned and practiced, and identified scenarios outside the course context in which those skills would be or have been useful. The basic skills, including reading texts critically and carefully, taking effective notes and engaging in discussion from a collaborative perspective, will help those students succeed in philosophy and other courses that they enroll in. As first year university students, skills such as these are critical to their future success. Furthermore, the ability to engage in metacognitive reflection sets them up to continue developing the skills they have, identify new skills and recognize when learned skills are applicable beyond the context they were learned in. Metacognitive reflection will not only help them to succeed in university and prepare them to excel in philosophy where metacognition and critical reflection are necessary skills, but will, if honed, support them in any career path they pursue.

The methods of philosophical reflection, and the concepts students encounter in the study of philosophical theories, can be relevant for and improve other aspects of their lives. The ability to recognize that a skill or concept is applicable in another context, however, is a skill in itself that needs to be trained and practiced. As an instructor, my goals are to promote the development of my students into reflective, respectful community members who recognize the value and importance of philosophy and philosophical reflection to their intellectual growth. This approach to teaching is particularly important in philosophy where students have the opportunity to learn how to productively and critically challenge their own and others' beliefs as individuals and as part of a community.