STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Everyone is a philosopher, but not everyone believes this about themselves. As an instructor, I aim to help my students rediscover this fact. We engage in philosophical thinking even in the most basic of tasks. When we're grocery shopping, we might ask whether a tomato is a fruit or vegetable, or in fact, what distinguishes a fruit from a vegetable. When we remember something we learned in school, we might wonder why we ought to trust the testimony of our teachers. And at some point or another, we almost certainly question under what circumstances we can break a promise to our friends or a loved one. The task of the teacher is to help students recognize that they are engaging in philosophical reckoning and to help them become better at doing so. In framing philosophy in this way, I believe we can reduce the stigma that philosophy is esoteric or essentially academic. Instead, we can help students better understand that philosophy is a useful tool in figuring out how best to live.

A key tenet of my teaching practice is the belief that learning occurs through discomfort. Being challenged makes students uncomfortable - but this discomfort fosters growth. To that end, I try to create a classroom environment in which students feel safe to express their ideas, and are open to being challenged by their peers. I am able to create this environment in three ways.

First, having engaged with a number of studies on how students best learn, especially students from disadvantaged backgrounds, I favor a discussion-based strategy over a teaching style that emphasizes the lecture. I generally find that students are afraid to speak up in large classes or whole-group discussions. But small groups or pairs offer a low-stakes opportunity for students to share their thoughts and receive feedback. It also helps to establish a community of learners who view each other as collaborators rather than competitors, who are collectively working to ask and answer the big questions.

Second, I am always very open with my students that we are learning *together*. I flag passages that are difficult and admit of multiple interpretations so my students know prior to reading what to expect. To manage difficult texts, I design activities, which I call 'jigsaws', in which students break into small groups and become experts on a passage or excerpt. Students then form new groups and teach students not in their original group the material they have become experts on. In this way students must depend on each other to succeed. I also provide handouts with scaffolded questions that students can use as they read along with a text. I find that this allows students to build confidence as they engage with a text. Offering a variety of methods for students to engage with each other and with readings – be it lecture, presentations, handouts or small groups – means that students can work together to discover the meaning embedded in a text. But it also provides an opportunity for students to openly (and safely) admit that they are all struggling or finding something difficult. This awareness removes some of the pressure students feel to understand things the first time around and gives them confidence to continue trying.

Finally, I request anonymous feedback at various times through the course, both formally and informally. I have employed two techniques that I find helpful in gaging what my students need. The first, a *3-2-1*, asks that students write on an index card three things they've learned or enjoyed thus far, two things they would change, and one thing they are still struggling with. The second method is to ask students to respond to the prompt: *What is something you wish your instructor knew about you but doesn't?* I usually share the feedback I receive with students and explain what changes I will make in response to that feedback. In this way, students feel that

they have a hand in the design of the course, and know that they are free to express when certain techniques are and are not working for them and that I will be responsive to their needs.

My aim in teaching philosophy is to develop critical thinkers who are capable of self-reflection and analysis. My goal as a teacher is always to show students how to think, not what to think. In this way, students can discover for themselves the value in philosophy. Teaching with this goal in mind allows students to see that the skills learned in philosophy are helpful outside of the classroom, and can be applied in their everyday lives.