My goal as a philosophy professor is to engender a love of wisdom in my students. To that end I structure my classes around the pursuit of knowledge and active engagement with classic philosophical ideas. I employ active learning pedagogical approaches, such as small-group cases or class-wide games, to best bring about this outcome so that when students exit my class they are equipped to explore the world philosophically.

I often present cases so students learn philosophy from a conceptual standpoint, as well as gain the ability to apply their knowledge. For example, in my Ethics course, after making sure that the everyone understands the basics of Kant’s moral philosophy, I break them up into small groups and assign each a morally ambiguous situation, like whether or not you should turn in a friend who has cheated on their taxes, tasking each group to describe how a Kantian would respond. The groups then report their findings to the rest of the class and we discuss possible alternatives to the solutions provided by their peers. Approaching the material in this way lends towards my classes not only hearing what Kant thinks about certain moral dilemmas, but it also provides them with the experience of choosing like a Kantian, which enriches their understanding. This process makes philosophy something active for the students, a thing that they can do and not just an area of study.

Beyond providing my students with cases to work through, I also use larger group activities like games. For instance, during a section on game theory in my Popular Culture in America class, I use a game that simulates a tragedy of the commons. The game involves students trying to get the most paperclips without unknowingly causing the paperclip market that I control to crash. Students thus have to try to convince the rest of the class not to be greedy even though it is in each individual’s self-interest to do the opposite. This game helps students understand the tragedy of the commons and gives them experience with trying to solve it. I then describe modern tragedies of the commons and we discuss how best we might approach solving them. This experience demonstrates the relevance and utility of the ideas that we’re studying.

I work to make sure that my classrooms are places where students feel invited to share ideas and participate. I start all of my classes by pairing students up and giving them a question to discuss that’s directly related to our topic for the day. After a few minutes I have the students share their thoughts, and we use those to guide us in our further discussions. This primes students for the material that we then work through, but it also works to build a community. As the students meet and share with one another, they grow more comfortable and excited to discuss and share ideas. Activities like the ones I’ve described help my students develop into philosophical thinkers, and not just individuals who know what philosophers have said. This, in turn, helps my students make philosophy something active in their day to day lives.

My research interests also guide my teaching. My current project aims to examine how to best implement reflective writing assignments in philosophy classes. This work has informed my own teaching practices, helping me to design better assignments by demonstrating to my students what good reflection looks like, as well as deepening my understanding of how to best implement reflective writing. Additionally, having taught at a wide variety of institutions that serve a diverse range of students, I approach both course design and classroom management with my student body in mind, making sure that I can create the best possible learning environment for my students.

Teaching over the years has shown me that in every person there is an individual who can think critically and philosophically. My goal as a teacher is to bring out the philosopher in each of my students. By doing so, I make philosophy more than just an area of study and, instead, it becomes something transformative for learners.