I have two main goals as a philosophy instructor. First, I want to help students to develop their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills about various philosophical topics. Second, I hope to help students to challenge assumptions in their everyday thinking that often go unnoticed. I believe that enabling students to develop in these ways is at the heart of a liberal arts education. While developing these skills will certainly help one succeed vocationally, it will also contribute to the liberal arts’ more central goal of developing the entire person morally and intellectually.

This crucial emphasis on moral and intellectual development requires a high level of academic rigour. As a result, I think there is no substitute for expecting students to attend lectures, carefully complete the readings, and working diligently on essays. In every course I teach I will always assign at least one formal essay. In philosophy, this assignment is primarily analytical, as opposed to research intensive. Students will be expected to choose one reading from the course syllabus and explicate the main argument found in the text. An accurate exposition of a philosophical text requires a slow and careful reading of the text. Writing a summary of an argument in a clear and precise format is a crucial skill which takes time to develop. The second part of the essay requires the student to critically assess the argument in question. Students will not be permitted to draw upon secondary resources to fulfill this expectation. Rather, they are required to assess the strength of the argument based on their own assessment. Forcing students to do this without the support of secondary literature is a good way to develop the critical thinking skills which are a hallmark of philosophers. I will provide students with written comments on their essays. This will usually take the form of 3 comments per page and a 250 word final comment. This provides students with an opportunity to improve upon their work in the future. Thus, the essay assignment enables me to achieve my first primary goal as an instructor.

Beginners to philosophy often wonder if it has any import to their daily lives. As a philosophy instructor I have the opportunity of showing students that their everyday life is filled with many philosophical assumptions. Students will learn that much of what they take to be common sense beliefs are often challenged by philosophers. While this can initially be uncomfortable for students, it is at the very heart of what makes a university education so valuable. The assigned readings in the course will naturally serve to accomplish this goal, but I will strive to make these connections more explicit in my lectures. I will pause throughout lectures to ask students questions that will enable them make the relevant connections to their everyday life. Finally, when possible one of the essay questions on the exam will make connections to everyday life and/or current events. For instance, philosophical questions regarding the nature of disagreement have direct implications for democracy, along with how we ought to understand the nature of pluralistic societies.

Both of my teaching goals will also be enhanced by office hours. My philosophical acumen was sharpened a lot, especially as an undergraduate student, from taking advantage of office hours. In my experience this resource is frequently underutilized, especially amongst lower year undergraduate students. I will make every effort to be accessible and also to encourage my students to use this resource. Philosophy is a challenging subject and instructors need to be available to support students, especially when the student has taken the initiative to seek guidance. In these ways, I hope to accomplish my goals of sharpening reading, writing, and critical thinking skills, while challenging commonplace assumptions.