That’s the core of the new Institute for Philosophy in Public Life, the motto of which is “Because there is no ivory tower.”

“People think their day-to-day experiences have nothing to do with philosophy,” said Jack Russell Weinstein, UND associate professor of philosophy and religion. “But philosophy has everything to do with life. Through the Institute, I want to show that what we do at the University is the same as what people do with their minds or talking with friends. Philosophy professors just do them more often, like car mechanics fixing cars or house painters painting.”

Weinstein established the Institute for Philosophy in Public Life as a partnership between the North Dakota Humanities Council and UND’s College of Arts and Sciences. Its mission is to bring philosophy to the general public and to make philosophical research understandable to non-specialists. This includes public lectures, a call-in radio show on Prairie Public, a film festival, state-wide discussion groups, and more.

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“Philosophy can seem irrelevant,” said Weinstein. “Yet, most of the great human insights began as philosophy. It teaches us how to get the most out of our lives.”

“Just look at what’s happening,” Weinstein continued: “The economy is in turmoil. The American place in the world is ambiguous. Our basic social experience is changing. There are questions about marriage, child-rearing, speech and behavior in public. Some people may see this chaos and lament it. Philosophers look at it and say, ‘Hooray, an opportunity to question; a chance to rethink our priorities and beliefs!’

“There is no better time for self examination than times of uncertainty,” he adds. “We need to understand ourselves enough to make good decisions. It’s a time to bring out the best in people.”

“Philosophy transcends politics, said Weinstein, because philosophers seek, as he puts it, “Truth with a capital T and Justice with a capital J.” Institute activities will be nonpartisan opportunities to talk about issues that unify the state, the foundations of being a North Dakotan, an American, a human being. They are a chance to celebrate the human mind and spirit as it’s found in North Dakota.

To this end, his guests will discuss everything from the nature of forgiveness to what it means to be an ‘insider’ in North Dakota. One guest is addressing the philosophy of hunting while another is asking if literature is “different” when it’s online. Even Sen. Byron Dorgan is slated to be on the radio show to examine the purpose of government and the meaning of freedom.

“The search for wisdom and pursuit of knowledge is a universal experience,” Weinstein said. “And North Dakota is one of the few places left where the concept of a statewide conversation actually includes everyone. It’s one of the better places to focus on philosophy,” Why? Because, he explains, its size and its close-knit communities provide a real advantage.

Weinstein hopes to take the radio show on the road. He has already started planning to visit Bowman and Maddock. In February, he and Institute fellow Clay Jenkinson will visit Velva through the North Dakota Humanities Council. In fact, he’ll happily visit any community that invites him. “We’ll go anywhere that wants us,” he said. “Nothing would make me happier than to have a waiting list.”

For more information visit: www.philosophyinpubliclife.org or www.whyradioshow.org