

Teaching Philosophy

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In my teaching I strive for respect, fairness, approachability, perseverance, inspiration, creativity, and happiness in order to achieve my ultimate goal: student success.

By respect I mean respect for the profession, to the institution I represent and to my students, as well as the respect I must earn from my students every day. As a teacher one must respect the profession by setting an example of excellence that inspires the students to succeed. This requires both meticulous preparation for class, and of the course itself, and also a responsibility to stay updated and connected to other colleagues. When one comes into a classroom ready and conscious of one's ability and knowledge, then respect is easily earned. But at the same time, one must treat students with a great deal of underlying respect so that they may feel that the sky is their limit. I always start my courses by quoting the song "What a Wonderful World": "I hear babies cry and I watch them grow. They'll learn much more than I will ever know." I believe that my students, no matter their past or present circumstances, can certainly achieve great things, and therefore I respect them for whom they are today as well as for their potential.

In order to set an adequate stage that will inspire the students and keep them motivated so they can reach their full potential, I start by laying the grounds of a very fair and clear set of expectations that will lead to academic success in the class. Realistic and achievable expectations and a sense that my final evaluation of their work will be unbiased, equanimous and fair are crucial to build trust. I want them to see me as a pedagogue and ally in their quest for excellence, and not as a judge that is policing them. The student's respect should be earned by fairness, admiration and gratitude in a classroom.

Since students respond differently to different styles of teaching and evaluation, I always emphasize the importance for them to express how they feel about the way the course is taught, the material presented, and the examinations set and marked. My door is open and I am also open to changes that will improve the educational experience for my students. In order to make them feel comfortable I try to engage them during a break or when I pass them on the hallway. In

class, I constantly engage them to make them feel like the integral part of the lectures and overall course that they truly are. A classroom is where people meet to share knowledge and learn from one another. In countless occasions I have been inspired by my students' questions and comments, and often they have had an influence in my ongoing research and in ideas I wish to pursue. Added benefits of making them participate in lectures, without making them feel tested, are learning their names and making sure that they are understanding the material. I want my students to feel like they should not hesitate to take the chance to talk to me.

Every chance I get to interact with my students I try to inspire them and to teach them the value of perseverance. I have already taught many different types of individuals and all sorts of classroom compositions. Each student is different and I have learned to adapt to idiosyncratic learning environments. Yet it is important for all students to understand that failure is only an opportunity to grow, a challenge and an obstacle to conquer. That is the true path to success. In this sense I always encourage a dialogue after examinations to make sure that morale is still high and that they take a constructive approach to the rest of the course. I express that their failure is partly my own and provide tailored advice on how to better prepare for the next exam. I want students that are unhappy with their performance to see me as an ally that will help them be where they want to be and become who they want to become.

To keep the students working hard and inspired one must constantly seek new ways to motivate all students in the classroom. Creativity in explaining the material and using the many technological innovations available to professors and teaching is crucial in keeping the students interested in the material. Dynamic presentations, audio, video, interactive homework and other online content are invaluable tools to the teacher of the 21st century. In lecture, for example, I have shown gas pumps closed in the 70's, visited Paul Krugman's blog and listened to an episode of NPR's Planet Money that discussed the multiple currencies that existed in 19th century America. As an economic historian I often reflect on how things were and I remind myself of the duty to keep up with the times and creatively seek to use all my modern tools in the classroom. But being an economic historian also helps me because it is a very interdisciplinary field. No matter what class I am teaching, there is always a historical example that fits in and clarifies a topic. I remember discussing Rockefeller in Industrial organization, hyperinflation in Germany during a macroeconomics lecture, and the Nabatean desert trade empire to motivate the many benefits that trade can bring about to a society. I also try to use popular shows in television

and movies the students might have recently watched to try to encourage them to look at things in a more critical and scientific way.

I am an enthusiastic teacher because a classroom is a constructive environment filled with good intentions and a desire to improve. When I look at my students, I see surgeons, creative researchers, meticulous accountants and statisticians, lawyers, businessmen and many other types of productive members of society. I feel responsible and happy to be able to play a role in helping them achieve their own success. In a sense, helping others achieve their dreams is part of my dream and I get to do it while talking about topics that I find extremely interesting. The truth is that teaching helps me feel happy and satisfied with my life.

But the ultimate goal of my teaching is not for me to be satisfied with my life, but for all my students to succeed. The more I teach, the more I realize the truly differential effect that I can have on a student's educational and lifelong success, and this has led me to become a more intentional educator. I invest time in order to stay up to date with the scholarship of teaching and learning and I have consequently been able to incorporate techniques such as retroactive learning or spaced learning into my teaching. I have also purposely set aside time to reflect upon how to increase student engagement and on how to improve my student assessments in order to strategically make them part of the learning process. Furthermore, I have studied the practices of the professors I work with as well as the institutional values of my liberal arts college in order to learn and apply more pertinent and effective educational practices. I now use active and collaborative learning activities that bring students together during and after class to work together on meaningful tasks, I take the time to model and coach active study techniques in order to ensure that my students, especially the ones that come to me struggling, learn how to learn and not just dedicate themselves to passing an economics class. In the latter sense, I promote work in groups and with individual partners, I ask them to explain topics and to answer questions out loud while working with partners or in groups, I also advise them to change activities to stay mentally alert, to strategically design and highlight their notes and I give them review questions to keep in mind while reviewing the material.

I have also begun strategically using the unofficial interactions with my students, my business interests and my research, which now includes two papers on the scholarship of teaching and learning, to continue to influence my student's success. I purposely ask my students about their present concerns and about their future goals and I try to advise them or point them in the direction of people who can better advise them. I also try to create opportunities for them that are

pertinent to their career goals and I therefore have 3 students currently working as marketing interns in one of the businesses I co-own and I am going to continue to find constructive internships for my students in the future. I have created research projects with the central intention of having my students collaborate as research assistants, I currently have a project in which 5 students have collaborated, and I can feel their confidence and abilities grow as the project moves forward. By showing my genuine concern for their future and offering them options to continue to learn and grow outside of the “course” we are learning together, I believe I can passively, by position myself as an inspirational educational coach and mentor, and actively help them succeed.

My students’ success is ultimately my own success and a great source of joy for me. As I believe should be apparent to the reader at this point, I take my job very personally and I will thus conclude this teaching philosophy by sharing my most rewarding personal experience this year, much more so than the academic award I obtained for my research. A student who had obtained a “D” grade last year, and who actually managed to get a C average in all his work during the last three weeks of the course, told me that “I believed in him even when he had lost faith in himself” and that he was very thankful for my dedication to him. He is doing much better in his classes this year and I like my job even more than I did before.