

Teaching Philosophy Statement

Effective Learning

In conducting and teaching classes, either as the main instructor or as a teaching assistant, my main objective and goal is to help students learn and creatively apply what they learn as part of a collaborative learning community. Facilitating multiple learning styles is certainly difficult, especially when the learning process, based on my observations and experiences, occurs differently for every student. Some students will learn best through in-class discussions of the material, either within small groups or with the class as a whole. Other students might find lectures (of varying length) to be their preferred learning strategy. Still others may prefer readings, essays and papers, quizzes, and/or online discussion boards. Adding to the difficulty is an observation that learning often occurs differently in different situations for the *same student*. I feel that, in the end, most students will learn best from a combination of approaches that draw on their multiple intelligences. At the same time, it is also important not to overwhelm them with too many ways of learning the material.

Effective Teaching

Effective teaching, in my view, requires the instructor to know their students: their learning needs, a little bit about their backgrounds and other activities, and their particular learning styles. It also requires fair and consistent grading: using rubrics for essays and papers that are a good fit for the particular class and the subject of the essay or paper, giving students useful comments on such assignments so they can improve in future, and being willing to answer any questions students might have about their grades. It also requires showing respect for students; their various concerns, issues, and problems; and their ability to learn the material being covered. It requires being a good mentor for students, both inside and outside of class and on a variety of relevant topics. It requires knowing one's limits: when to send a student to someone else to discuss a particular topic or situation, how much grading and other teaching activities one can manage to complete, and what one does not know as much about. Finally, it requires knowing one's own teaching philosophy and teaching in such a way as to be true to one's beliefs, ideals, and thoughts.

I do my best to have all my teaching be effective along these lines, measuring such effectiveness in three ways. First, I self-reflect on my own experience during a course, particularly focusing on the relation of those experiences to my teaching philosophy. Second, I also reflect on how well I feel the students learned—including their grades for assignments, participation, and the like in this reflection—and the nature of the collaborative learning community they were a part of. Finally, I also obtain direct feedback from the students on their judgment of my teaching effectiveness.

Implementation: Teaching Strategies

The strategies I aim to implement to help students learn necessarily vary from class to class, but there are many commonalities. While I cannot possibly adjust for every single learning style, or use every single teaching strategy, in any given week or session of a course—or even in any given semester—I do try to use multiple methods and strategies in any given class,

considering those that make the most sense for that particular course and group of students within the constraints imposed by time. I ground the strategies I select in the objectives for and purpose of both a given week of the course and the course as a whole, doing my best to make certain the course structure is clear to students. As noted above, my goal with any and all strategies is to engage students in learning and creative application of what they learn. Strategies I have personally used in the past that I feel have contributed to successful student learning and to the building of a learning community include readings, short lectures, in-class discussion, question and answer sessions, small group critical thinking activities, and online asynchronous discussion boards. In my future teaching, I want to take these strategies and expand on them to include more interactive learning, particularly exploring the use of new information and communication technologies to involve and engage as many students as possible with the course material and indeed with each other as part of a collaborative learning community.

Goals

It is my responsibility as an instructor to help and support my students however I can, to help them learn the material, skills, and knowledge necessary not only to pass the class, but to be successful in their future careers. The purpose of a university is to be a successful learning and training environment for students' lives and careers. As an instructor, my philosophy is to value and support that environment using the most appropriate direct and indirect strategies within a structured and focused course. I greatly enjoy being able to have students grasp concepts and apply them creatively to new and exciting situations, and believe strongly that the university environment—and each class offered within it—should be a collaborative and creative learning community. I greatly value the experience of building such a community and helping students learn and apply what they learn in my classes, not just for the purposes of passing the course but for and in their lifelong experiences and careers.