

Teaching Philosophy: University Writing Center

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Writing Your Teaching Philosophy: A Step-by-Step Approach:
<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/philosophy/index.html>

Example teaching philosophies

From: The Teaching Portfolio at Washington State University
<http://www.wsu.edu/provost/teaching.htm>

Students should derive long-term benefits from their time in my classes by continuing to grow and develop. Rather than supply students with static facts, I believe that I will serve them better by teaching them how to define a problem, how to decide what they need to solve it, how to find and evaluate new information, how to recognize their limits, and how to be prepared both for change and to change. I prefer to involve the student in a creative thinking process. A difficult teaching issue, but an important aspect of clinical practice, is the ambiguous, uncertain, and sometimes contradictory nature of clinical problems. I continue to learn from experience and from the literature about the dynamics of teaching and about my discipline so I can improve my effectiveness as an instructor.

From the portfolio of David M. Singer, Department of Geological and Environmental Sciences, Stanford University http://pangea.stanford.edu/~dmsinger/Teaching_Portfolio.pdf

As a student, I have observed that the best teachers were those who cared the most about teaching. This passion is one of the single most important components of effective teaching as it leads to thorough preparation, continuous evolution of teaching skills, and the pleasure

of watching students learn. The amount of time that a teacher puts into preparation directly translates to how the students learn. However, a teacher must be able to recognize how students learn best at the group and individual level, and let their lesson plans metamorphose as they interact with their students. The ultimate goal for the teacher is to communicate new information to students, not just memorizing facts, but also to learn how to think. This process can be made more efficient when both the teacher and the students enjoy what they are covering. Combined, these aspects allow a teacher to determine how a certain group of students will learn best. In my teaching experience, efficient learning by students consists of the combination of formal lecture periods, and smaller discussion sections.

During lecture periods, students are exposed to a stream of organized information that will teach them the basic blocks of the subject. The impact on the student is enhanced when the lecture is given as a narrative; where the information is clear and organized but presented in a softer story-like manner rather than dry lecturing. This also allows the lecturer not just to present coherent information, but also to keep a captive audience. In physical sciences, and in particular within earth sciences, teachers often ask students to take a leap of faith when learning new material. Concepts that are the fundamental building blocks of subject and sometimes abstract, are often taught in reduced form in order to quickly lead the students to see the big picture, particularly at the introductory level. For example, when teaching an introductory course in earth sciences, the lecturer must explain how atoms are the building blocks of molecules, which link to form minerals, and these minerals combine to form rocks. The audience is not necessarily familiar with the fundamental chemistry in order to understand the subject at every facet, however the goal for the teacher is get the student to understand the larger driving forces behind how and where these rocks and minerals form, and not advanced chemistry. The students are asked to take a leap of faith; they have to trust the lecturer enough to accept these possibly unfamiliar ideas in order to move on to see the larger framework. Trust in the teacher is also derived from the passion to teach. When students see that their teacher has a passion for teaching and for the subject, they have an easier time accepting that the difficult material because they trust the teacher. For a teacher to say "this is complex, but we will return to it after trying to see the bigger picture", requires trust by the students so that they don't just doze off. Teachers who lack the passion to teach run the risk of losing this trust in students, who might easily just tune out the subject, rather than try to understand a perplexing concept. The lecturer is responsible for reviewing this more difficult material in a discussion section where the subject can be treated with greater detail, allowing the students more time to integrate all parts of a subject to see the big picture.

In discussion sections, students working in smaller groups explore subjects at a deeper level than presented during lectures. In this open atmosphere, the discussion can progress on tangents instead as a linear narrative, allowing students to work on a specific subtopic before moving on to the next concept of the general subject. The teacher acts as to facilitate the discussion using a Socratic type method to guide the conversation. While students are not always happy to ask a question, and get a one in response, this method is ultimately very fulfilling for them. In my experience, if students are simply given an answer, they are not forced to go through any thought processes to figure out the problem. However, when asking them questions in response to theirs, they can be lead along a line of thought where they work through the answer themselves, with some assistance in trajectory. Students feel satisfaction for working through the problem, and for effectively teaching themselves the answer. By not spoon-feeding them responses, they develop the tools to work through a general problem, and not simply how to memorize answers. They now learn how to adapt to different systems, where the synthesis tools are the same. At introductory levels,

discussion sections are often stagnant because of student's timidity toward giving responses. In order to stimulate conversations, the discussion leader has to rely on icebreaker skills to motivate students to talk. The simple act of learning a student's name and a piece of information about them shows the students that the teacher has a vested interest in their class, and is genuinely interested in helping their students. Calling a student by name makes for a more intimate relationship between teacher and student, and again allows the students to put trust in the discussion leader. The teacher is then free to ask questions in order to lead a discussion, without getting blank stares in return. In more advanced classes, a discussion leader might simply be able to pose a few questions, and only intermittently add insight to facilitate discussion. This can be one of the more pleasurable teaching experiences, as the teacher can now watch as the students learn and teach with each other based on the knowledge set that they have been given by the teacher.

Some of my favorite teaching experiences have been when I have been able to integrate both lecturing and discussion components into a single setting. This can frequently occur in the form of review sessions. I have been a teaching assistant for the course "Earth Materials" (a core sophomore level class in the department of Geological and Environmental Sciences) several times. For the final exam, I have developed two review sessions in order to help the students assess the large amount covered in this course. For each session, I have developed a question and answer packet that the students work through during the session. My goal for them is to help them organize the information they have been taught, and to make sure they understand the material at a detail level, but also to understand how each part fits into the whole and to see the big picture. During the review sessions, I have the students work together to answer the questions. When new questions arise, I instruct them to ask each other so that everyone is part of the learning process. When they reach a question they can't answer, it is now my task to do some lecturing, and help them sift through the material. I can review tricky material, or present a clearer picture than what was presented during the initial lecture. It is also in this forum that students can clearly see how I have a passion to teach. When helping students through a tricky problem, I enjoy watching the light flash in their eyes when they work a problem through to completion. My enthusiasm to teach translates to their enthusiasm to learn. This enthusiasm coupled with proper instruction allows the students not only to meet their educational goals,