

# Teaching Philosophy

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December 23, 2015

Effective, quality teaching is based on what you put into it. A key ingredient, I believe, is passion. Passion has a two-pronged positive effect: boosting students' interest and instructors' development in the subject matter. This philosophy comes from my experience teaching a range of students from traditional to non-traditional and from middle-class to economically disadvantaged. My passion motivates me to keep abreast of the literature in my subject area and drives my research agenda. It also infuses my delivery of course material with enthusiasm, which, in turn imbues students with curiosity and a degree of excitement for the course. Other important ingredients are the creative techniques the instructor employs to make the learning experience more rewarding for students. Below I discuss some of the pedagogical tools I use in the classroom to make for more effective teaching.

I see my primary role in the classroom as creating a space for students to develop ideas and think independently, while providing them with facts and a theoretical basis on which to build their ideas. As such, I not only help students understand what is important, but also encourage them to develop their critical thinking skills. If we are going to inspire a new generation of thinkers then asking students to regurgitate lectures is insufficient. This approach is limited, and thus, in my classroom, I allow students to engage with each other through *cooperative learning*—a process in which, students share ideas, interact with, challenge, and build on their colleagues ideas in a respectful manner. I have used this approach in a variety of courses and it has shown to be a good method for students to develop debating, critical thinking, and listening skills. For example, I put students in groups and ask them to design a new constitution for an ethnically diverse country recovering from a civil war that caused a collapse in government. To do this, students have to incorporate what they learn about constitutions and apply it to the given scenario. Working with their peers, students spend time in and outside the classroom designing a constitution. The main lessons students usually take away from this exercise is that designing a constitution is not a simple task, and compromise is vital to the process. Teaching is much more than covering a given subject matter.

Outside the classroom, I incorporate a number of case-study writing assignments that require students to analyze and apply theories and concepts studied in the course to the real life current and/or historical, political events. I also include the use of documentaries to complement lectures to allow students to visualize the relevance of course concepts and topics we discuss in the course. For example, I use the documentary *Life and Debt* in my World

Politics class to illustrate the implications of structural adjustment policies and economic globalization. The use of audio and visual aids augment the learning experience and facilitate different learning styles. I have been fortunate to be the beneficiary of good instruction. There were times during my educational career when passionate and caring teachers and professors motivated me to persevere, especially in the face of challenges with the subject matter. Being a beneficiary of such an approach and experiencing firsthand the transformative effects of supportive educators, I see advising, and more so mentoring, as imperative for student success. As such, helping students achieve their academic goals is one of my primary objectives.

I have come to the realization that good teachers are not born; they are themselves taught and develop into good teachers. As such, becoming a good teacher requires continuous assessment and adjustment to improve my craft. I frequently assess my delivery of lectures and classroom management by consciously evaluating what worked and did not work. I also rely on feedback from students and peers as they give that critical outsiders perspective. Furthermore, as part of my development as a teacher, I attend teaching workshops and speak to colleagues about ways to improve my skill.