

Teaching statement

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Why are the students here? The way a professor answers this question forms the basis of their teaching philosophy and the way they manifest their answer becomes their teaching style. I realize there are many reasons for pursuing higher education but college is, at its core, a means to an end. For a student, the end may be clear from the very start or completely unknown but the college experience should facilitate healthy growth intellectually, mentally, personally, socially, and culturally. The professor should at least be responsible, as much as an instructor can be, for the student's intellectual growth and I believe the role should encompass the larger picture of growth that students hope college provides. The driving force behind my teaching is to help the students achieve the goals they have set for themselves that brought them to college.

The ways I have incorporated this goal-oriented learning experience into my teaching includes the time I take to understand my students, the expectations I set for them, how I appear as a mentor, and the ways I have altered my teaching to benefit student growth over fleeting knowledge gains. With so much inconclusive research on teaching and so many different recommendations of how to improve learning gains, I think it's important for every professor to find what works best for themselves, taking advantage of their strengths and minimizing the impact of their weaknesses. Critical assessment of my teaching from my students and peers is necessary for me to achieve this goal.

I spend time at the start of any course to get to know my students and remain considerate of their goals throughout the semester. I reach out to struggling students and help in the ways I can to achieve or reestablish their goals. It is important to me that each professor is part of an ongoing conversation with their department as a whole to align its academic vision with the changing needs of students as we prepare them for an ever changing world.

In line with my opinion that professors should promote growth beyond intellectual gains, I have always felt it is necessary to have an expectation of my students that reflect the expectations they will find in their future career. Instructing students on how to meet these expectations is a part of my courses and one that is valued by my students.

A professor can often times become a mentor or role-model for students. This responsibility should not be overlooked or taken lightly. I understand the huge benefits of a diverse and inclusive classroom and take steps to showcase those benefits by allowing all opinions to be heard and views expressed when appropriate. Having volunteered as a medical care provider I am acutely aware of assisting with mental and physical disabilities in the classroom. I am aware of the current research into the achievement gaps between gender and minority groups and plan on including exercises on values affirmation and addressing stereotype threat in my teaching.

With knowledge becoming more readily available through the Internet, the job of an instructor has shifted since I first began as a student. There is less of a focus on disseminating knowledge and more so on inspiring the motivation to seek out information and do so efficiently and credibly. My lessons for introductory courses are designed to show the students the most interesting parts of a subject and go in-depth on scientific literacy. I have found that I am most effective at this when I use humor and storytelling to engage students. The lessons in my higher level courses in physics and astronomy would prepare students well for research with a focus on problem-solving skills that would be applicable to all fields using active learning strategies. I would also take the time to discuss career skills I have experience with such as fellowship writing, presentation, and scientific design.