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Engagement can mean many things, but as it relates to the classroom, it is essential. Student interest is directly related to academic performance, particularly student retention. If I cannot connect with my students, I will be unable to engage them in the material. My teaching philosophy is grounded in passion, energy, and a student-centered pedagogy. Enthusiastic teaching helps engage students in the material and fosters greater understanding of course content. The best teachers bring a deep passion to their work conveyed by heartfelt enthusiasm in and out of the classroom. Teaching is critical because it holds the potential for change in the life of a student and in society at-large.



“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

PEDAGOGY

My teaching philosophy is rooted in student-centered pedagogy with a focus on student interaction. By using interactive lectures, thought-provoking activities, and creative exercises, I facilitate discussions that effectively connect theory and practice. I value an interdisciplinary lens as it allows students to explore a topic holistically and develop critical thinking skills. I infuse my teaching with the values of equity and inclusion by discussing the social structures that encourage racism, classism, and structural disparities.

Technology is fundamental in my teaching philosophy; it is reshaping work in the academy and online education. My courses prioritize students' participation through the use of online learning tools. My core approach to teaching is to cultivate engaged and analytical citizens by effectively incorporating a thoughtful variation of teaching techniques. I utilize group work to help establish strong peer relationships and foster greater involvement in the course. By using exercises where the students work in small groups to unpack concepts, students apply the theoretical material in real-world scenarios and case studies. In small groups, students take turns assisting each other in applied concepts and content application. I often integrate the materials they develop in the small group session into the course review material. This assists in reinforcing to the students that I value their input and active participation within the course.

For applied courses, I use handouts titled “In class practice,” to help students gauge their progress in mastering key concepts discussed in the readings and lecture. Using this technique, I am able to effectively identify concepts students struggle with and provide appropriate pacing throughout the course. I regularly develop games with the lesson material to encourage interaction within the classroom.

CHALLENGES

One of the greatest challenges I have experienced is allowing students to take ownership when they struggle with content application. A technique I employ is holding additional study sessions with students after exams. During these small sessions, I review recent course material to allow students to assess areas and concepts they find more complex. Though all students are encouraged to attend, students who made a “C” or lower on the previous exam are required to attend. Student feedback on these sessions has been positive, expressing an appreciation for my commitment to their individual academic success.

REFLECTION AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

I develop my coursework with the purpose of creating meaningful experiences to actively engage students in problem solving activities, thoughtful dialogue, and critical thinking. Recognizing that students enter my courses with a wealth of prior knowledge and personal experiences, I try to connect them using a variety of perspectives, adjusting for different learning styles, and a range of content knowledge. My role as an instructor is an integral part of my professional life. I routinely reflect on my teaching philosophy and seek out professional development opportunities to improve my abilities as an instructor.

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

Student evaluation of my instruction is directly aligned with my teaching pedagogy. As captured in the student course evaluation comments below, my classroom approach reflects enthusiasm, passion, and an opportunity for students to routinely assess their mastery of the subject.

“Professor Evans was very enthusiastic about teaching and I enjoyed her very much. She made learning fun and related to the students very well” (Summer 2011).

“Prof. Evans shows enthusiasm and interest in this topic and makes a very dull class pretty interesting” (Spring 2012).

“Professor Evans teaches with great passion for her students to learn. I went into this course a little nervous being that I’m not a traditional student. She made me feel comfortable and actually went out of her way to be sure I was grasping the material” (Fall 2013).

“I just would like to say that the way the class was structured with handouts, classwork, and homework was very helpful. I felt like I was in high school again, but it helped me a lot with the material when it came to test time” (Fall 2011).

“Originally, I had some reservations about the course. However, after our first class meeting those reservations were completely dispelled. Professor Evans turned out to be easy going, very social, and most importantly, incredibly well-versed in the subject matter of the course. The way material was presented through PowerPoints and in-class discussion made the concepts very easy to understand. For once I can’t really think of anything I would change in the course to make it better as I don’t think I have ever had an easier time learning the subject” (Spring 2013).