

Teaching Philosophy Statement

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As a non-traditional student with the goal of earning a PhD so that I may teach at the university level, I must confess that I haven't actually given much thought to a teaching philosophy. I suppose that, given my considerable experience in the classroom as a student, I have developed a 'feel' for what has helped me understand the material and for what did not. For example, my experience (as a student) has been that using Power Point is a quite effective sleeping aid but only a marginally effective teaching aide. Thus, I don't use Power Point slides in any of my lectures.

One thing that I discovered when I started lecturing for ECE3710 is that preparing for lectures taught me more about the material than I ever learned in the classroom. Thus, I've often told students that were having some trouble with the material to try explaining the material to a pet (dogs work really well for this). Often, when trying to explain something to someone, I've found new insight into the problem in the process of explaining and so, I have reason to believe that others will too.

During lecture, I try to engage the students often by asking questions designed to break them out of their note taking trance. Let's face it, when the instructor is rapidly filling the white board up with equations and you are doing your best just to keep up, your brain isn't actually processing the essence of the material but is instead focused on manipulating your writing utensil efficiently.

When questions are asked by the students, I always try to say something along the lines of "that is a good question, I'm glad you asked." The fact is, if students don't ask questions, I don't have any feedback and so I'm running open loop and full speed ahead. I greatly appreciate student questions because then I get some idea of where the class 'is' with the material and whether I need to slow down or even backup and review. Thus, whenever I can, I thank the student for asking their question in hopes of encouraging others.

Although I greatly enjoy lecturing, I find that I enjoy the tutorial lab sessions even more. The setting is much more interactive and there is no 50 minute time limit! During these sessions, I often ask the student to work the problem on the white board while explaining the problem to me. Once again, the idea is that the act of focusing your thoughts for the task of explaining the problem helps you to 'sort out' the problem and see something you've missed before. Often, the student, in the process of explaining the problem, answers his or her own question without my help at all.

I know that the class 'gets it' when they start correcting me while I'm at the white board. There is a moment, usually after the break, when the class has become more comfortable with the material and me. Sometimes, I confuse myself during lecture (those equations always look different up close at the white board!) and the class happily straightens me out. It's at that point that I know I'm making a difference.