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# Teaching Philosophy Statement

Being a student is stressful. Most students take five courses at a time, each with its own homework, assignments, quizzes, midterms, and finals, all while attending multiple classes each week. At the same time, they are told their grades will determine whether they get into graduate school or secure a good job. In that environment, we ask them to sit in our classrooms, memorize as much as possible, and retain only a fraction of it by the following semester.

In the pressure to perform, students often forget that college is also a time to discover what interests them and what they may want to do with their lives. Higher education is no longer as optional as it once was, and many students arrive in our classrooms because of strong societal pressure to earn a degree framed as determining their future. Because of this, I believe our responsibility as teachers is not simply to deliver content, but to help students leave the semester curious and motivated to keep learning. In an age where information is instantly accessible, the long-term value of a course is rarely the specific content students memorize. Foundational concepts still matter, but most of what students ultimately need will be learned later through experience or continued study, which means the most important outcome of a course is often curiosity rather than content retention.

Because of this, I see my primary responsibility not as delivering information, but as creating the conditions for engagement. Real learning happens outside the classroom when students follow up on a reference, question an idea on their own, or connect a concept to something they care about. The classroom is where that intrinsic motivation begins. My role is to help students understand not just what they are learning, but how and why it matters. When the material aligns with their interests, I encourage them to go deeper. When it is important but not immediately compelling, I work to show why it matters in relation to their goals, questions, or curiosities.

This philosophy shapes how I structure my courses. I often provide optional readings or short videos before class so that students can engage with the material at their own pace and depth. Class time is then used for a brief review followed by small-group activities where students apply ideas, debate interpretations, and confront the ambiguity built into most concepts. The goal of these exercises is not to arrive at a single correct answer, but to recognize that the material is more complex than it initially appears. When students realize that the questions are genuinely open and that their perspective matters, participation becomes a natural response rather than something that has to be forced.

A key part of this approach is treating students like adults rather than like children who need to be managed. I speak to them directly and transparently about the purpose of the course, why we are doing certain activities, and what I hope they will get out of it. I also acknowledge a reality that is often left unspoken, students come to class with different goals. Some are there because they are genuinely interested and want to go deeper. Others are taking the course to meet a requirement and simply want to pass. I try to make it clear that both positions are

acceptable. Not every course needs to become someone's passion. What matters is that students understand the core ideas and feel respected in the process. Paradoxically, this honesty often increases engagement. When students do not feel judged for their level of interest, they are more willing to participate and more open to discovering that they may care more than they expected.

Building a sense of community is central to this work. I aim to create a classroom environment where students feel like they are part of a shared intellectual space rather than an audience being evaluated. Much of this comes from tone and responding to ideas rather than correctness, allowing room for uncertainty, and framing discussion as collective sense-making rather than individual performance. Small-group work helps lower the stakes, but the broader goal is to create a culture where contributing feels normal and safe. When students feel like they are being spoken to as people, with their own motivations and goals, they are more willing to take part.

My approach to evaluation reflects the same values. Traditional grading systems often encourage performance optimization rather than learning. When students focus on maximizing points, they become strategic and risk-averse, avoiding anything that might hurt their grade. I prefer a structure closer to pass / failed / exceeded. Students who are less interested in the topic can demonstrate core competency without unnecessary pressure, while those who are engaged have the freedom and incentive to go beyond expectations. This framework communicates that meeting the standard is sufficient, but that deeper exploration is available for those who want it.

In practice, I try to reduce unnecessary pressure while maintaining clear expectations for rigor and understanding. I build flexibility into assignments, encourage students to take intellectual risks, and support projects that connect course ideas to their individual interests or career paths. I am explicit that thoughtful experimentation is valued more than safe but superficial work. My experience has shown that when the environment feels low-stakes but meaningful, engagement increases and attendance remains high, participation grows over time, and students become more willing to contribute. When students feel respected, understood, and given room to engage on their own terms, they are far more likely to invest in the learning process.

Ultimately, I see higher education as a space for discovery rather than credentialing. An important part of my role is to show students what is possible and help them figure out where they fit. If they leave my class more curious, more confident in their thinking, and more motivated to pursue ideas on their own, then the most important learning has already begun.