

Teaching Philosophy

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In a single word, my teaching philosophy revolves around incentives. Students need to have the incentive to learn the subject, attend class and excel on evaluations. To this end I have instituted several policies to ensure my teaching constitutes a productive approach.

First, I never have mandatory attendance. This sort of attendance by fiat leads to high regulation costs, as well as a black market. I remember undergraduate classmates writing the names of their friends on roll sheets, and the professor never bothering to verify. I believe it is my job as a professor to engage students so they want to attend: both because the subject has direct relevance to their life and interests, and because attending the class has a noticeable effect on the students' performance.

Second, I teach whenever possible using problem solving, especially when the subject is difficult or counter-intuitive. I start with a simple iteration, take them through step-by-step (using the board, never pre-fabricated PowerPoints) and explain my reasoning as I proceed. Then I break them into groups and give them a slightly harder iteration. In this way they have a solid foundation to work on more nuanced problems outside of class in problem sets.

Finally, I always try to incorporate some sort of presentation by the students, usually centered around extensions of the subject after we have covered the necessary course material. Researching and public speaking skills are among the most important an undergraduate student can develop, and facilitating that is one of my primary goals. This engages students with material, as well as serving as a great impetus to invest additional time in the subject. There are few better motivators for learning than being told you will have to present on the subject in front of your peers.

With regards to grading I fully acknowledge that I am a fallible human being. I attempt to hold myself to strict objectivity. To this end I use clearly defined rubrics and practice blind grading whenever possible. In this way more charismatic students don't get an additional boon.

My teaching methods and philosophy are constantly evolving and I learn something new in every class I teach (such as taking 2 10 minute breaks instead of a single 20 minute in a 3 hour class). I try to remember my experience as an undergrad, and with that in mind consider what I can do as an instructor to enhance the learning process.