

Teaching Statement

Alan Ritter

I enjoy teaching and mentoring students, and this is one of the main reasons why I would like to pursue a career in academia. I feel that good teaching is about creating a welcoming environment for students that pushes them to accomplish things they didn't know were possible, and hopefully provides them with the self-confidence to set their own appropriately ambitious goals in addition to a foundation of skills to help achieve them.

Good teaching is important for the field because it helps to attract and retain students. It is also a good way to get undergraduates involved in research; I believe there are interesting projects and important questions which can be answered by students at all levels. Finally, teaching is a great way to hone presentation and communication skills and also to re-organize one's understanding of the material providing fresh perspective.

Teaching Experience

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to assist my advisor, Oren Etzioni, in teaching the undergraduate machine learning course at the University of Washington on two separate occasions. One of these was the first time my advisor had taught this particular course, and also only the second time it had been offered at UW. I therefore had the opportunity to have significant influence in designing the homeworks and also helped to write questions for the test. In addition, I gave an hour long lecture on neural networks in class, which I found to be a very enjoyable experience.

Mentoring Experience

Also at UW I had the opportunity to mentor Sam Clark during his senior year and masters program. I supervised Sam's work annotating a corpus of tweets and building a part of speech tagger and chunker for Twitter. I feel this is a great example of an appropriate project for a bright student interested in learning about a new field (NLP), as it has a clear objective and also results in a self-contained and useful end-result. This helps to give the student some sense of accomplishment and provides them with a clear contribution they can describe when applying for jobs. Sam is now working as a data mining engineer at *Decide.com*, a Seattle startup company.

Teaching Interests

I would be interested in teaching a variety of courses including introductory courses on programming, data structures, discrete math, operating systems, databases, and more advanced courses in natural language processing, machine learning, probabilistic models, and artificial intelligence. I would also be interested in organizing graduate seminars covering recent work in information extraction and lexical semantics, or language processing in social media.