

## Reflections on Teaching

At SUNY Potsdam, I have taught 8 different courses, ranging from freshman to senior level, including two entirely new courses. I have had the opportunity to teach several of these courses multiple times. In each of these courses, the students have provided extensive feedback through the end-of-the-semester evaluation process. Additionally, I have also been fortunate to have my peers sit in several of my classes and provide me valuable comments about my teaching and the course material. All of this has meant that I have had plenty of feedback on my teaching to take a stock of what works and what needs to be changed.

With the pandemic, the last two semesters have been a time for innovation and reflection. In Spring 2020, we had to transition to online courses at short notice and this meant that we had to quickly select software tools to teach, the mode of offering our classes, and change our courses to fit the new reality. For me, the transition to online was made smooth by my prior attendance at the CCI workshop in early Spring 2020, where new technologies for online education were introduced to us. I reasoned that asynchronous offering would be best for students and using my learnings from the CCI workshop, I designed weekly materials consisting of pre-recorded lectures, related short quizzes, and associated homeworks. Students were appreciative of this structure and seemed to like the flexibility in the schedule.

To help students with the lecture material and to allow for some face-to-face time, I had 3 hours of online office hours on all weekdays on *Discord* (Computer Science department server) for students to “stop by” and discuss any questions they had.

At the end of Spring 2020 semester, I looked back and realized that the asynchronous format was not ideal. Personally, the format felt distant to me, as I did not have much interaction with students, particularly with those students who were underperforming. For me, interaction with students was a key attraction to be a faculty member and this was missing in the asynchronous format. To address these issues, I switched to synchronous mode for my courses in Fall. This change resulted in a semester that felt much more “normal”, with regular student interaction and an ability to keep up with student performance on a regular basis. The feedback from students at the end of the course was also very positive for this mode of teaching and I’m continuing this format for Spring 2021.

As I go into Spring 2021, the primary issues of concern are: 1) how can I offer exams online that is fair to everyone and 2) how to get all students to participate in class discussions and be more open about asking questions. I’m trying out a few measures to increase student participation in class discussions including: calling out students randomly and having them answer questions related to the lecture; and having short in-class quizzes that test students’ attention to the lecture material. For exams, I’m still considering a few options and hope to have some solution by the end of the semester.

I have also been thinking about equity in student-learning. While the online offering with access to recorded lectures and electronic office hours have benefitted some students, other students, have found the transition a bit challenging. Lack of tech equipment or being overwhelmed with stress associated with school and personal life has challenged students unevenly. In my

interaction with students, I'm trying to be cognizant of these differing perspectives and challenges that students face and planning on being flexible in my dealings with them, as much as possible.

Some of the changes in my teaching over the last two semesters will continue going forward, even when we get back to in-person teaching. As an example, my use of technology in the form of tablets for teaching and discord for office hours will continue for the near future, supplementing my traditional teaching methods and student interaction approach.

Reflecting the effort that I put into the courses, my student evaluations, as in years past, were highly positive and I was awarded the Favorite Professor Award by my students in 2020. I was also fortunate to have my peers sit in several of my classes and evaluate me and they were highly positive about my offering. I always carefully look through the feedback from my students and peers to see how I can improve and modify my teaching style/content.

As an educator, it is important to not only provide students with the material to learn, but also create the right environment for learning. I recognize that students have a range of identities, and comfort levels in expressing them, and hence have taken care to be respectful of their choices and preferences while making them comfortable in reaching out to me as needed. I have also made sure that students in my class are always respectful to each other and have an environment where discussion is welcome. This is reflected in how several students visit my office hours (a minimum of 6 hours per week) regularly and even stop by after hours.

Teaching reflections for individual courses are also provided in this portfolio for review.