

Teaching Philosophy Statement: Ze Shen

I have experience in both online class and face to face class. I was the first teaching assistant for an online course in my department, and managed the course for six semesters. I set up the course on eCampus, and it is still in use today. Compared to a traditional face to face class, the online class is quite challenging. Some students are off campus, on an internship or studying from a distance. They only use fragmented time to learn and use two ways to communicate with instructors, by emails or through a web platform. I cut each chapter into small pieces, held online office hours every weekday, collected general questions and gave face to face review lectures once a week. Besides, the online course does not have a specific time to give lectures, it is hard for students to follow the course schedule. So I posted a course calendar at the beginning, sent out notifications for each assignment and allowed multiple attempts on quizzes. I was responsive and experienced in dealing with general problems and special cases in the online class.

For the face to face class, I divide my teaching philosophy into three parts: preparation, incentives and feedback. The first stage is to be ready to teach. It is necessary to design an explicit syllabus and tell students in the first few weeks, what this course is about, how the subject is structured, what the instructor expects and how the final grade is allocated. It is important to let students know what is coming during the semester and help them prepare. Moreover, it is important to draw a big picture for the course. For example, I am scheduled to teach Financial Management in Agriculture in Spring 2020, and some students may think this course as teaching cash flows, calculating tedious present value and future values. However, I will let them know, this course is aimed at teaching how to solve financial management problems in agriculture. During the lectures, I will always tell students “3W”: where we are, where we are going and why we are going there.

The second stage for teaching is incentives. Interest and assessment are two big parts of incentives for students. Teachers have been using various strategies to inspire students to be interested in the course materials. My strategy for the interest incentive is to let them get involved- discussions and projects. Let's take Financial Management as example. During lectures, I will post a discussion question and let students discuss it as a group. In addition, I will create a discussion board to encourage students to post their own questions and answer the questions posted by others. I will participate in the discussion also. The most active students and the students with the best questions would get extra credit. In this way, students are more engaged and are motivated to think deeper. For the project incentives, my idea is to help students apply the financial analysis and planning learned from this course to start their own business. If some of them are not interested in starting a new business, they will be encouraged to do work on an investment project for an existing business owned by family members or people they know. I would be trying to get them to analyze, to solve problems, and to bridge the class materials to the real world.

Assessment is crucial for incentives too. Over years, people strive to find ways to make studying fun and enjoyable. However, studying is not fun in most cases. The puzzle remains on how teachers can incentivize students when “studying is not fun”? Traditional assignments and quizzes are still effective. In my teaching, I will put 20 percent of the assessment every two weeks on assignment, this would motive students to study after class. Some problem sets are based on tutorial materials, and some others are related to real word problems, which requires students to analyze and come up with their own solutions. In addition to assignment, I will give quizzes during lectures, and have them discuss the problems with classmates.

The final part of my teaching philosophy is feedback. I believe it is much more important what students have learned than what they have been taught. It is crucial for a teacher to learn about what students are interested in and how they feel about the class. In other words, I need and want to hear from students. This “hearing” helps me adapt to different situations and improve teaching efficiency. I have both short term and long term plans to hear from students. The short term feedback refers to each class for each semester. For instance, when I was previously a teaching assistant for Financial Management, I observed students' reaction during review lectures. It is quite easy to roughly

figure out who was following me, who was confused and who is not attentive. So I need to adjust my speed, rearrange time allocation for each section, repeat or asking questions as needed. I would also hear from the quizzes and assignments, to ensure whether everybody are catching up. If anyone gets lost, I need to figure out whether he/she has problem with the prerequisites or they were having a party late at night!

My long term feedback essentially is data collecting and analysis. I would hold an anonymous survey for each chapter. The chapter survey contains questions such as: which part in chapter 2 is the most difficult for you; for assignment 2, how long did you spend in reading textbook, how long in discussing with other students or teaching assistant and how long in writing answers. In this way, students' feedbacks are transferred into data, which can be used to make professional analysis, and to improve the teaching efficiency in long term. Other sources are also helpful in getting feedback, like communicating with other instructors, encouraging students to stop by my office, and keeping an open mind on advanced teaching strategies and techniques.

I am excited to teach classes and regard it as a part of my career. Besides, I am receiving professional teaching training from a program held by the Center for Teaching Excellence in Texas A&M University. In sum, I believe my teaching enthusiasm, training and experience, together with my academic background and communication skills, make me ready for the classroom.