

Teaching Statement

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Too many students fall prey to the belief that success in life and work hinges on their ability to regurgitate information from the classroom on exams and assignments. My years of educational experience demonstrate that the transition to viewing knowledge as something more than a conduit to a grade is often incredibly challenging for students. Despite the inherent difficulties, it is the most important step to developing critical thinking skills. Guiding others to see knowledge this way, as others have for me, is what motivates me as an educator. Every day in class presents another opportunity to help students develop the desire and skills to critically approach the world.

The question becomes how teachers can best help students develop these skills in a time when smartphones and the internet have made human knowledge accessible from nearly any location. Furthermore, educators must help students discern potential biases of sources and learn how to evaluate methodologies--an aspect of critical thinking skills that is sometimes overlooked. My teaching approach centers on the philosophy that, in a technological world, educators must be more conscientious about the value we provide in the classroom. The service we perform does not lie in simply conveying information, but rather in teaching students how to approach research questions, use available tools to answer these questions, and critically evaluate the result. To develop this level critical thinking and add value for my students, I strive to: 1) Intentionally design my courses with critical thinking at the forefront; and 2) Treat education like a conversation between student and teacher.

A student will never be able to fully engage and apply material they do not understand. To ensure students internalize class topics, I design my courses to focus on clarity, intuition, and opportunities for application of the material. Clarity is just as important inside the classroom as it is outside of it. In class, I work hard to make my lectures and explanations tractable to keep content as clear as possible. Outside of class meetings, transparency in the grading system, easy-to-use course websites, and clear expectations are all fundamental for student success and subsequent critical thinking.

Clearly conveying content and expectations forms the foundation of critical thinking, but is not enough by itself. I provide intuition to concepts in order to foster critical thinking development further. Without intuition, course concepts simply become talking points or information to be restated on an exam. The intuition of course content allows students to understand *why* the content is worth studying and, more importantly, how it applies to the world. I frequently use relevant examples in class so that students can see this link between the classroom and daily life. In doing so, students can begin to creatively apply concepts to their own lives and experiences.

This is the final step to developing a student's critical thinking ability. Once they understand a concept and how it applies in various circumstances, I challenge students to apply concepts through a combination of targeted writing assignments and supplemental practice. My writing assignments are generally open-ended, short application pieces describing something they have

observed personally. The value in these assignments is that they force students to truly think about how economics plays a role in their own life while allowing them to write about something that matters to them--which anecdotally has improved the writing quality. In some of my assignments, students are asked to incorporate and analyze data using different software programs with the goal of teaching them the research process. Despite initial hurdles for some students, many enjoy tackling the challenge and feel empowered when they harness the power of technology to investigate questions for themselves. Regardless of the course assignments, my design-practices focus on clarity, intuition, and application so students in my courses advance their critical thinking skills and grow to view knowledge as something more than grade-related. Moreover, they begin to see that the classroom and life outside of it are inextricably linked as they engage, apply, and critique content.

My second method of providing value to students comes from treating education as a conversation featuring plenty of dialogue; effective education must be multi-directional. I work hard to maintain an atmosphere that makes students comfortable enough to ask for help, both in and out of class. More often than not, questions are never unique to a single person--therefore a student's questions are a vital component towards the development of other students' level of comprehension. It is not enough to simply ask students periodically if they have questions. To garner a greater level of comfort, I try to get students to interact with each other as well as me. Through guided discussions and debates between small groups of students in addition to the class as a whole, I endeavor to show students that they can express their beliefs, engage the beliefs of others, and maintain a sense of respect. In today's sometimes toxic political climate, this helps to both give students more in-class confidence and practice expressing themselves in general.

I care about my students and the subject I teach. When it comes down to it, the student comes first. Each time I step into the classroom, I seek ways to improve and openly request feedback on a regular basis. I take criticism well and have on more than one occasion adapted the course mid-semester to make sure that I have provided value to my students in this time of rising education costs and open-access to information. Teaching in all settings, including my own, is an evolving practice and one that I am always looking to improve. Amending my course design and developing a comfortable atmosphere fosters critical thinking skills that are essential and I value the opportunity to play a pivotal role in their development. I have taught many principles, intermediate, and field courses and look forward to the chance to continue teaching in any setting.