

Teaching Philosophy Statement

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My primary objective in teaching is to stimulate, encourage, and reward active, critical inquiry; all other objectives, all assignments, techniques, and assessment tools are designed to support that goal.

By “active,” I mean that I stimulate, encourage and reward engagement by the students with the course material, with their peers, and in the intersections between the course material and the topic at hand. I model active engagement through my own passion for literature and writing, through ongoing critical inquiry regarding my scholarly interests and their relationship with the world, and through my respectful yet critical appreciation of the perspectives of disciplinary experts, colleagues, and students. In the classroom, I make extensive use of group work, presentations, and projects, thereby creating an active pedagogical setting. To be “active” also means that I am always prepared for class, that I continually refresh my knowledge of my subject matter and its social and cultural implications by remaining alert to changing cultural formations, and that I stay up-to-date with my field through research, conference attendance, and writing.

By “critical,” I mean that I stimulate, encourage, and reward analytical and interpretive thinking. I model critical thinking for my students by designing appropriate and complex discussion questions and by respectfully challenging my students to move beyond the easy answers. In the classroom, I often use a Socratic technique of critical questioning; it allows me to play a less authoritarian role in class discussion, thereby stimulating discussion while keeping it focused. It also allows opportunities to draw reluctant students into the conversation by directing questions specifically to them. In response to student writing, in conference and in written comment, I ask critical questions that lead the student to discover a more powerful rhetoric, rather than prescribing one that should be followed by rote. When evaluating student writing, presentations, and projects, my grading rubric rewards growth in critical thinking as much as it does growth in technical areas.

Finally, by “inquiry,” I mean that I stimulate, encourage, and reward what I believe to be the highest functions of the human mind: the posing of intriguing questions, the creative search for answers, the synthesis of information, and the ability to situate our knowledge and ourselves in the greater scheme of things. I ask this of my students; I require it of myself.