

Teaching Philosophy

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I teach in the humanities at a university where science and technology reign supreme, which takes a certain level of patience and tolerance. It also presents the opportunity to reach students not already inclined to believe that words as well as rocket ships get us to the moon. My teaching philosophy, which emphasizes practical application of rhetorical concepts, has been forged through this experience. Teaching how to effectively communicate through words and images offers a way for me to help students discover unrealized power. It is rewarding. I appreciate the challenge of illuminating the ultimate influence of visual and textual rhetoric on our world, and more directly, the students' own lives.

My professional experience in public relations, business journalism, marketing, and Web development has given me a context for teaching communication skills. I can show students how a powerful presentation has value in the workplace, and how using both written and visual mediums will increase their own value in a professional setting.

In the classroom, I focus on how to apply abstract ideas to practical situations, but also stress the value of artistic expression for its own sake. My approach to teaching involves student-centered learning through detailed assignments that incorporate various technological tools.

Student-Centered Learning. I avoid lecture as a primary mode of instruction in communications classes. I put students' needs at the center of the courses, requiring them to regularly lead discussion, share their written work, select readings, and contribute ideas and feedback to their peers. While I plan courses carefully and provide clear guidelines, I encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning by removing passivity as an option during class. I also like to move outside of the classroom whenever possible. For example, in a visual design course, I took graphic design students to a local marketing firm and asked them to subject their own projects to the hard scrutiny of the outside world.

Detailed Assignments. Creating documents, in either paper-based or digital formats, requires skills learned through practical experience and specific assignments. I provide students with detailed coursework that demand they use specific ideas and skills, but that also allow for – and encourage – significant creativity. While an assignment to develop a persuasive argument in a freshman English class may allow for a written report, for instance, students might also express their argument through a visual medium. In an environmental communication course, I had the students create an audio-visual autobiography – using text, images, and audio – that expressed specifically how the environment has influenced their ethics and values. Detailed assignments give students a clear sense of project parameters and allow them to explore their own ideas and ways of expression.

Teaching with Technology. I use digital technology in the classroom and outside of it. While I avoid using technological tools that distract from learning in either classroom or Web-based courses, it seems that I regularly find uses for them where none had existed in the past. Students should be comfortable using digital technologies in a wide array of professional conditions and, for that, experimenting with digital formats in the classroom serves a distinctly practical purpose. It serves the students to learn that PowerPoint presentations can contain more than clipart and bullet points. Technology also allows writing-adverse students to express themselves visually through digital design, which enhances their ability to communicate.

Ultimately, I want to show students how strengthening their communication skills matters to their own lives both professionally and privately, and why it matters to humanity as a whole.