

B. Teaching Philosophy

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

Teaching one to think critically is no small task. Most students learn by constructing knowledge based on an engaged learning process rather than by absorbing knowledge from passive sources. The diversity of student backgrounds, abilities and learning styles makes each person unique in the way he or she reacts to information. The intersection of diverse student backgrounds and active learning needs a comfortable, positive environment in which to take root. Therefore, one of the chief goals of a teacher is to establish a course atmosphere in which students feel at ease, have a voice, are encouraged to explore ideas, make choices, and value their own dignity and worth.

Promoting a comfortable community atmosphere is a task which I pursue in earnest throughout each semester. Teaching involves vast amounts of energy, energy to develop a solid curriculum and clear expectations, but more importantly, energy to display enthusiasm, create an environment of respect and to engage students in learning to their fullest potential. The role of a teacher is that of a guide, an intellectual resource, a coach, and an entertainer. In higher education we should be cultivating, nurturing, modeling, and expanding the highest level of human excellence. In a learning context, students on a higher intellectual level follow their curiosity and engage in learning independently of rewards. Human nature is not an averaging of people’s behavior but rather is revealed as we cultivate excellence.

Teaching critical thinking, as expressed by Martin Luther King above, is the goal of education. Setting a high bar for critical thinking is important not only within the context of a specific course, but also as a life-long skill. I encourage students to think outside the typical structure of course material and answer questions by integrating their own experiences with ideas they encounter in class. Writing therefore should not be relegated exclusively to non-science courses because writing requires critical thinking. Encouraging students to write across the curriculum challenges students to experience course material in such a way that leads to a higher level of understanding. Finally, teaching and learning should be an enjoyable experience. Having fun will impart to students the desire to become life-long learners.

Teaching well also requires a continuous process of evolution. I see myself as a teacher entering the middle stage of a journey, equipped with pedagogical resources, positive experiences, and the desire to grow. As a teacher, I must improve and learn from experiences tempered by the guidance of experts. Pathways I use to help me grow as a person and as an educator include developing a learner-centered classroom, welcoming feedback, using the pedagogical literature, working with a mentor, and keeping a teaching journal. There is no better way to improve as a human being or a teacher than to spend time helping people cultivate excellence.