

# TEACHING STATEMENT

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Teaching is defined in the dictionary as “to impart knowledge or skill to”. While this definition is accurate, it is unilateral. My personal philosophy incorporates this barebones definition but moves beyond by adding passion and compassion to the teaching process. Indeed, teachers are yoked with more responsibility than merely imparting knowledge or skill, but should inspire others (not just formal students) to understand, relate and apply principles, concepts and skills. Teachers should connect with students and then move on to inspire and challenge; all the while providing timely feedback.

Research and teaching have a symbiotic relationship. Good research can impact teaching and teaching can impact research. Active research provides examples, applications and new ideas into the classroom especially in a situation where professors are teaching classes directly related to their research. Teaching provides an open forum where ideas can be developed through verbal expression and dialogue. Occasionally I have met professors who feel burdened by teaching, citing it distracts them from their main goal of research. Although research is important, the importance of teaching should not be minimized – and I feel strongly that professors have not only a contractual obligation, but an ethical and moral responsibility to provide inspiring instruction and guidance to students. Integral to the stewardship of professors is the responsibility and privilege of caring for their students.

Setting firm guidelines, maintaining high expectations, administering fair assessments, and allowing accessibility to the teacher are important. Policies and guidelines must be clear and as explicit as possible (or required). Students should be expected to uphold a high level of academic conduct. Ample opportunities to demonstrate understanding and receive feedback will help students progress in their learning.

In the summer of 2007, I taught a required, introductory computer science course, Discrete Structures (CMSC 250), which covered a broad spectrum of topics including propositional and predicate calculus, number theory, inductive reasoning and more. The course was an accelerated 4 credit course in 8 weeks. In the class I was able to incorporate my philosophy of teaching in several concrete ways. Besides the nuts and bolts of course requirements and policies, I made it very clear that all were expected to adhere to the honor code which set a high standard of academic integrity. In order to provide ample opportunities to demonstrate understanding, students received thirteen assignments, five quizzes and three exams. Students generally received submitted homework assignments, quizzes and exams within two to three days so they could get frequent and timely evaluations of their individual progress. This enabled me, as instructor, to address questions and review difficult concepts where necessary.

Although the classroom experience is important, teaching extends beyond the confines of the classroom. While formal and traditional means of education are important; more intimate, informal opportunities that occur in office hours or mentorships have a profound effect on students. I recognize the profound impact such experiences have had on me personally, and look forward to mentoring students. Providing students hands-on and one-on-one interactions is a goal of mine as I feel it has tremendous impact and inspires them to progress and learn.

Lastly, not only does teaching extend beyond the confines of the classroom, but it also reflects inwards, into the instructor as well. A good teacher must always be willing to listen, sit back, and alter content and delivery as appropriate for the specific students and situations. In this manner, external and internal observations and reflections can be used to improve teaching.