Teaching Philosophy

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My philosophy is that engagement is key to student learning, both in terms of unlocking a genuine desire to learn and then achieving that outcome. Moreover, I want students to understand the real nature of my content areas—psychological science and animal behavior—and to think critically about the various forms of information they encounter in everyday experiences in a way that enables them to apply what they have learned to real life situations. This is particularly important due to the enormous amount of misinformation and oversimplification of my areas as portrayed in the media.

To help engage students in the very large classes that I teach, I have invested considerable time in technological enhancements designed to capture their interests. The presentation software that I use in class (Apple Keynote) is a platform for delivering multimedia instead of lists of bulleted text. In realizing that pedagogy precedes technology, I use the latter to support what I am discussing, not to simply duplicate it. This challenges students to actually listen to what’s being said and to view the supporting technology as a means of enhancing their understanding, rather than simply sitting in class and copying bullet points.

I am also a strong advocate of providing students with means outside the classroom to facilitate learning. For over a decade, I have offered supplemental instruction in General Psychology I., in which a former student re-attends my class and offers two one-hour tutorial sessions each week based on the material I covered in the previous lecture. I have also invested a great deal of time (up to 8 hours of extra work per week) in General Psychology I. and Animal Behavior with podcast series available worldwide in iTunes. My main podcast series (for General Psychology I.) is called, “iCube: UConn Psychology,” and consists of two enhanced podcasts each week that provide a sneak preview of important points that I’ll be covering in the next class, a set of video podcasts that review the material that I covered in the last class, and weekly audio podcasts in which I meet with students from the class to discuss class material. The “Animal Behavior Podcasts,” have been weekly discussions about course material with Honors students (who receive Honors credit). Also, I invested over 400 hours to re-create my Animal Behavior course into a series of screencasts. It is now a hybrid course, in which most of material is available as streaming QuickTime video, and the remaining material is presented in class. Student learning has been phenomenal with this format.

Whether it’s students in my class, my advisees, or any other student interested in psychology, I value the time that I am able to spend with them during and outside of office hours. Getting to know as many of them as possible is a priority because I don’t want to see them get “lost” amid the crowd or view us as aloof. I care deeply about their education and about their future, and that is why my students are my top priority.