

Reflective Statement

Anonymous, 2004

Teaching and learning are two of the most important activities most people ever engage in. Our capacity to grow in wisdom as well as stature is what makes us human. A university, dedicated to the growth of knowledge, has the responsibility to help its members grow in wisdom. Careful, thoughtful, even loving, teaching and learning are absolutely essential to the university's purpose.

I believe that teaching and research are intimately related. A simile will best explain: research is like a tree, useful and often beautiful, but limited in its effectiveness. Teaching is like the fruit of the tree, which may be carried away and used by many people. Without the tree, there would be no fruit; but without the fruit, the tree is isolated and its scope of influence small. In the university, both teaching and research must be honored and supported for the university to serve its purpose as a benefit to society.

I believe in equality of opportunity. Each student deserves equal opportunities to learn. Students must have fair access to classes suited to their abilities, interests, and talents, plus equal access to classes that will fulfill their degree requirements. Furthermore, within the individual classroom, each student deserves equal opportunity to learn. I strive to reach out to both the most and least advanced students and to use a variety of classroom techniques to relate to different learning styles and student experiences.

I believe in shared responsibility toward the common goal of student learning. As an instructor, I am responsible to express clear expectations for students and help students to fulfill expectations; to design and organize effective learning activities; to provide information and provide direction for students to find further information; and to accept, consider, and respond to students' learning needs during the semester. Students are responsible to be prepared for class; to participate in class and take the opportunities available for learning; and to communicate honestly with me as the instructor.

I believe in mutual respect between professors and students, and in respect of instructors and students for non-academic experts and citizens. Mutual respect between professors and students is absolutely necessary for student learning to occur: my students need to trust that I have something to offer them, while I need to respect the effort that students make to master new skills and to recognize that student ideas can contribute to my intellectual development. In many fields, non-academic practitioners are highly competent and knowledgeable. Their experiences bring a vivid reality to classroom learning, and help students to realize that the knowledge they gain in the classroom has ramifications for people's lives, and that there is more to life than the classroom. I try to include interaction with non-academic experts whenever possible in classroom activities or assignments.

I believe in interdisciplinary learning and that the university should support interdisciplinary learning; for example, interdisciplinary curricula, or at least

curricula that include classes from other disciplines, may be designed. In my classes, I include lessons or assignments that require students to look beyond content boundaries. In the future, I would like to include service learning, experiential learning, learning communities, and learning outside the university in my courses or in curricula I am involved with.

I believe in using appropriate technology and techniques for learning. Any classroom technology should be used because there is a learning goal that can be furthered by that technology or technique. The choice of chalkboard vs internet vs outdoors, for example, should be made based on the disciplinary requirements, the professor's teaching style, and the particular knowledge students are expected to gain. I tend to limit my use of computer technology in the classroom itself, but lean on internet technology for assignments and communicating with students. Hands-on learning (e.g., creating spaces) has been beyond my reach so far, but it is a goal for my teaching.

I believe that values are as important as content knowledge. The question of why we teach and learn something, what meaning and relevance our learning holds for the larger community, is critical. Professors should recognize and communicate the values that underlie their teaching and even their subject matter. Students can then begin to hang their growing knowledge on a framework of very personally important pegs, namely values they believe in. They may even make learning choices such as choosing majors based on the relevance of disciplines to their deepest interests, making them far more effective learners. In my classes, I usually begin with a discussion of values, and I try to exemplify the discussion through my choice of activities. For example, if I say that in my discipline, non-academic practitioners' expertise is valued, I include meetings and discussions with such people in our activities.

Growing in wisdom is no small task. For all of us, it should take a lifetime. The university can help students and teachers on this path by providing them with the best possible opportunities.