Teaching

Teaching Philosophy

I am constantly adapting my teaching philosophy to meet the needs of the diverse learners that I encounter. I have maintained four basic principles throughout my seven years teaching at the college level. Keeping these ideas in mind helps me focus my teachings and mold my instruction to meet the overall goals of the course. Those four principles are information, application, technology, and creativity.

Information is the most fundamental of all teaching principles. I work diligently to go beyond what is on the pages so I can tailor my teachings to the specific audience and the situation. My number one responsibility is to have an advanced level of knowledge to pass on. This means researching, assessing, reading, studying and discovering many different perspectives on the subject. Just reading the textbook that the learners will use is not good enough.

Without real life application, knowledge learned in a classroom loses value quickly. If the learners are simply doing the minimum amount necessary to pass or achieve a certain score, then the impact I have stops as soon as the class period ends. Getting to know learners on a personal level and helping them apply the information to their needs increases the effectiveness of the classroom experience. One of the challenges that I have when teaching students is making sure they are taking the vocabulary, theories, and ideas from class and understanding how they fit into their lives outside of the classroom. A theme throughout each semester in my classroom is, “How will I be able to use this?”

Technology is an increasingly important aspect of all professions. It is also a great way to reach the many different learning styles that students have. When used properly, it increases the effectiveness of your information dissemination. Having a technology plan is vital because it is easy to misuse in a classroom setting. PowerPoint is fine for certain areas of a class. However, using that for every lecture, while easy for the instructor, is boring and ineffective for the learner. Using video, audio, online applications, one-on-one demonstrations and many other technologies helps me to find the full potential of my students. Assigning work that utilizes the applications gives students firsthand experience that is difficult to find time for without the proper direction.

Allowing room for creativity is a responsibility that must be thought out in advance. It is important, and sometimes difficult, to give students ownership of the situations they encounter. Learners need to be allowed to creatively adapt certain aspects of the information in order to get the most out of a class. I believe students are best served when they are actively involved in the process of learning and encouraged to make individual learning choices.

I am learning from every session I teach just as my students are learning from me. Being able to prepare for a course based on the core group of ideas outlined here is crucial in keeping me grounded and focused. Ultimately, I hope to give students the information necessary not only to pass the course, but to increase their understanding of how to apply the skills they learn in any situation that may encounter in the future.

Evidence of Excellence in Teaching

Student and Faculty Assessment

The strongest piece of evidence I can submit is the opinions that the students have of my teaching effectiveness. One look at my Student Evaluations of Instruction (SEIs), which are included in my Digital
Measures file, paints a strong picture of how I have made a difference in their college careers. I have consistently scored at the very top of the department in all categories. This is a great source of pride for me and I think it is further enhanced by the fact that my grading has become more rigorous throughout the years. The average grade earned in my class is lower than the department average in the CST 110 course. The fact that students who are getting B’s and C’s in my class are still overwhelmingly responding in a positive manner speaks to the thoroughness of my syllabus, rubrics (which can be found in the Digital Measures file) and the communication level that I am able to maintain with each student.

I was able to fill a void left by departing faculty members by teaching two sections of CST 271 – Contemporary Media in Everyday Life. The SEI’s, which are included in my Digital Measures file, and the departmental feedback I received upon the completion of the course, were outstanding.

In addition to the student opinions, I have submitted letters of reference from UW-L faculty members who have extensive contact with my teaching methods and interaction with the students that I have taught. I have also included, in my Digital Measures file, classroom observation reports done by my CST colleagues. These supporting opinions have a common theme praising my student centered approach. They also make strong cases for the evolution of my teaching as the recent observations show the growth in my ability to reach beyond the textbook and apply the material to what students will be encountering in the future. I am humbled by the comments and feel fortunate to work alongside people who have such a strong respect for my contributions to the students and the University.

**Self-Assessment and Growth**

I have consistently updated and adapted my teaching. The course name and number might not change, but the materials I use and the activities I develop are constantly evolving.

Public speaking anxiety is an issue that most people struggle with and I often hear from students that they are really dreading having to take CST 110. Bill Cerbin, director of the Center for Advanced Teaching and Learning (CATL), recommended the book *Whistling Vivaldi* by Claude Steele to me during a training session entitled Brief Interventions to Improve Student Outcomes. Steele illustrates a number of studies from which I have read and developed ideas. One such idea looked at how a sense of social belonging reduces anxiety and stereotype threat. The study concluded that brief commentaries and reassurances from their peers make students more comfortable and confident. To incorporate the idea, on the final exam, I have my students write an informal postcard to the students who will be taking the same course that they just completed.

Final exam (included in Digital Measures file) Question 65: Write a quick postcard to the students in Prof. Smith’s CST 110 in the Fall.

The students are told why the question is being asked and they know that the question is optional and not being graded. Not a single student has ever opted to not provide comments. I share all of the comments (without the names of who wrote them) with the incoming students at the beginning of a semester. The feedback I have received from students about this simple activity is that it really eased their mind about the direction that class was headed. That simple activity has made the first few class periods much more productive and fosters a trust and comfort level in my classroom.

Another example of how I have grown as an instructor involves a section in CST 110 that has remained constant despite course or textbook changes. That section is Perceiving the Self and Others. The first few times I taught this section I ran through simple visual aids and gave basic ‘match the term to the definition’ assignments. While this method was fine for helping students to memorize terms, the
textbook and my basic teaching method fell short of explaining how the terms related to actual situations. To help them internalize the concepts I have now incorporated a guided writing exercise (Chapter 2 Discussion Guide in my Digital Measures file), that directs the students to think about how a term or concept affected them in various circumstances. One question is, “Think back to the last time you wasted an hour doing something non-productive. Why did you do it...and why did it take you so long to stop?” Having the students provide their own real world example for the term Self-Assessment gives them a direct perspective on how it applies to them. The guide is simply a playbook for me to start from as the answers and discussions often lead to very productive dialogue. That section has become one of my favorite ones to teach and the informal feedback from the students has been fantastic as I often see them use those terms throughout their writings and activities later in the semester.

In the CST 271 course, I developed an activity that both allowed the students to be creative and to develop a better understanding of how mediums and sensationalism can affect our perceptions. I had the students listen to a brief portion of the RadioLab Podcast (http://www.radiolab.org/2008/mar/24/) on Orson Wells’ infamous War of the Worlds radio performance from 1938. I then asked them a series of questions about the incident, including a question about whether or not something like this could happen in today’s society. Forty-four of the 46 students answered that they did not believe another incident like this could ever happen again. I then had the students listen to recaps of how the incident had, indeed, been recreated and elicited a similar reaction in a number of different instances. I had them complete an activity in which they designed a media campaign that could bring about similar results. The open ended aspect of the assignment was a huge success as the students came up with creative and thought provoking ideas that were very diverse and showed the variety of skills and interests they had. Allowing students the freedom to express those interests in a creative way made for a great learning experience.

In the spring of 2012 I attended a CATL workshop that focused on using Twitter to improve classroom instruction. Some of the ideas and concepts from that workshop led me to develop a plan to put those ideas into practice throughout all four of the CST 110 courses that I am teaching. This involved a lot of planning because the biggest strength of Twitter is the immediacy and flexibility of disseminating information. I had to find ideas and information that would have the students wanting to stay connected without feeling as though I was encroaching on their personal time. Advertising specialists refer to this concept as touch points. When consumers get the message because they want to, they are much more likely to act upon the information. I currently have 71% of my students voluntarily following my Twitter account. I do not offer any incentive or reward other than the fact that they can use it to communicate with me. We bring up messages and exchanges during class to use as examples of how technology affects communication. The informal feedback that I have received from this use of technology has been astounding. Not only have the students felt like they have benefitted from the interactions, I have received positive messages from friends and parents of the students as well. The students get the sense that they can contact their instructor in an additional way and they also are learning the intricacies of how to effectively communicate using the technology.

**Service**

As an instructor you are not only responsible for your own classroom, but you are representing your department and your school as well. Sharing my time and energy with my colleagues benefits me as an instructor in a number of ways. Working with others helps me to gain perspective and knowledge that I can pass on to my students. Volunteering my time to various committees and individuals allows me access to the information they have to offer. With all of these experiences I do my part to make the
environment a comfortable place to work and I utilize the knowledge gained in the classroom to help my students develop as individuals.

As an example I will give a quick rundown of a service load that I embraced. During the fall semester of 2009 I not only taught in the CST Department, but I also worked for the Information Technology Department at UW-L, served on the Parking Appeals Committee, served on the Salary and Personnel Committee, served as the chair on the Health Science Center Academic Team and served on the Health Science Center IT/AV team. When you add in the service I was doing in the La Crosse community as well, the work load and service time seems overwhelming. I would argue that it is not only manageable, but necessary to maintain relationships, make the University a better place, and expand my understanding of the University culture. By devoting time to service I am able to bring together all the aspects of the University so that the students can benefit from a total view of the culture.

Library literacy has become an area of interest and expertise for me over the past two years. I am the co-principal of a group that has recently been awarded a $43,000 program development grant (included in the Digital Measures file) to develop an asynchronous online library literacy component for the CST 110 course. This is a large undertaking and something that is not required of IAS members. I feel that putting in the extra time and effort to potentially aid my colleagues in an area I feel strongly about is an important thing to embrace even if it is above and beyond what is expected.

I am also currently serving as the CST 110 course Library Liaison. I spend a lot of time and effort coordinating with the library staff and the other CST department members to ensure that all interested parties are confident and comfortable with the student outcomes associated with library literacy.

Of special note is my role as an Academic Adviser. This is a role not often assigned to IAS faculty and I feel honored that my department has such strong confidence in my ability to pass on valuable information to the students.

Many other service commitments are highlighted in my Digital Measures report. I am a very active member of the La Crosse community and spend a lot of my free time helping to shape future college students by serving on the Education Commission of the Aquinas School System. They value my expertise and look to me to help develop a strong educational plan for K-12 students.

Summary

Throughout my time as an Associate Lecturer at UWL I have exceeded the normal expectations of the position. I have excelled in the area of student evaluation, evolved my teaching practices and provided valuable service to my department and University. With my years of service, the evidence I have provided and the support of my department, I respectfully request a promotion from Associate Lecturer to Lecturer.