

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Michael S. Jeffress

In the past, I composed teaching philosophy statements that contained a plethora of academic terms and discussed Boyer's Model of Scholarship. That all looks nice on paper, perhaps, but in practice, my teaching philosophy is much simpler and centers around six core values: preparation, diversity, fun, accountability, critical thinking and social justice. I realize these six core values do not form a witty acronym. They are neither alliterative nor parallel in form, but they work well for my students and me.

First, effective teaching begins with preparation. Few things frustrated me more when I was a student than to have a professor walk into class and simply read lecture notes. My class time is devoted to facilitating dynamic and engaging presentations and discussions. Second, my teaching affirms diversity. On one level, I value diversity in terms of my pedagogical strategies; on another and more important level, I value diversity as a quality of life (e.g., race, gender, age, religion, physical ability, etc.). A primary teaching goal is to help students recognize, understand, and appreciate diversity in its many forms.

Third, I believe that good teaching should be enjoyable, generally speaking, for both the instructor and the student. Using humor and creating enjoyable experiences relaxes students and makes them more receptive, especially when they have anxiety over an assignment. Fourth, my teaching stresses accountability. I maintain high academic standards and expectations, communicate clear expectations and consistently evaluate performance based on them, while being flexible in extenuating circumstances.

As it relates to the first three core values, technology plays an integral role. Part of my preparation involves making connections between course content and communication technologies that students utilize and that the job market requires. I regularly have students create videos and multimedia presentations. They often use Skype and other social media platforms to complete assignments. I have students publish digital media content online, and they will work through cloud drives, such as Google Drive, to create and edit shared documents.

Fifth, critical thinking is a central goal of my teaching. In an age of rising populism and "fake news," this core value of my teaching philosophy is, well, critical. I tell students that I believe my number one job is to help them cultivate critical thinking skills. If I can teach students how to think independently and critically, then they will realize the fallacy of some of their beliefs. They will be able to locate and analyze good information. They will find some of the answers they need and begin to explore the questions that they previously had not contemplated.

Finally, social justice is a theme that permeates my teaching. I want my students to apply their learning to real-world problems. My highest aim is to equip students with the knowledge, skills and confidence to speak truth to power. I constantly challenge them to choose topics that matter for their assignments. My goal is for them not merely to become an attractive candidate for a job but for them to go out into the world and make positive contributions to society.