

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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To me being a teacher means being modest

I believe that modesty is the key to becoming an ideal teacher who is excellent in lecturing and mentoring students. I have seen several intimidating and arrogant professors who did not spend much time preparing lectures. The images of these professors stick in my mind as negative examples. Since then, by being modest, I hope that I can prevent myself from becoming another negative example to students. I have the following three concepts in my mind while I am teaching.

1. "Knowing My Ignorance."

It seemed to me that the arrogant professors misrecognized themselves as bestowing knowledge upon their students. Professors may know more than students about the particular topics they are teaching, but this is not an appropriate comparison. Any kind of comparison is dangerous because it could lead a professor to a misperception of superiority.

In my childhood, my mother never belittled my questions and always looked up the answer in an encyclopedia if necessary. She used to tell me "You can say that you 'know' something only when you truly understand it without any blur." Thanks to her, the same attitude seems to exist inside me. For me, by insistently telling myself that "I could be wrong," I hope I am repeatedly considering my preparation for classes and answers to students' questions from many different viewpoints. This healthy attitude of skepticism allows me to present clear lectures. Similarly, since I always think I could be wrong in some sense, it is impossible to belittle any question from students, and I handle every question in a respectful manner.

Furthermore, when I search for an answer to a question in my office hours, due to the skeptical way of thinking, I often go beyond. Answering just the given question does not satisfy me, but I feel I need to be ready for other potential questions that are likely to arise next. So, I consult materials other than textbooks, like an encyclopedia or an internet site, in front of students. Seeing teachers who try to expand their knowledge, I believe, students get more motivated to study.

2. Students as My Clients

I am not saying education is customer service, but I still believe teachers should treat students like their clients. For example, it is easy to attribute poor performance to the students, but we should take responsibility for students' learning, includ-

ing considering that our own teaching may be part of the problem. Even if students do not have motivation to attend lectures, I should motivate them by my teaching to come to my class, without any incentive such as quizzes or attendance credit.

When I talk with students, I never cross my arms or legs. When I talk about my students to other people, I call them "Student-san" in Japanese, which is roughly translated into "dear student." I have memorized students' names so I could call each of them by her/his first name. I always keep it in my mind to thank students for their questions and attendance. These acts seem to be trivial, but they instill in me a respectful and accommodating mind-set, by which I can be an approachable teacher and be responsible in lectures and mentoring.

3. Lecturing as Team Sports

As playing sports gives excitement to some people, lecturing in front of an audience gives the greatest excitement to me. In fact, after every lecture, I feel very excited and my heart rate goes up. This is probably the reason that students appreciate me as an enthusiastic teacher. For me, the pleasure of teaching comes from the interaction between the teacher and the students. Therefore, I try to draw students into the process of creating the lecture as much as possible. This kind of lively and dynamic lecture results in students learning better. To achieve this, not only my lecture style but also live examples of teaching materials are crucial.

For example, I try to bring extra materials to each lecture. When I taught mathematics, I provided brain-teasers that were related to my lectures. For Japanese lectures, I thought cultural aspects would inspire students more than the grammar that we learned through textbooks, and I brought trinkets into the class. One day, I even wore a Kimono, Japanese traditional wear that I carried from Japan. I also started writing a web log, which about 20 students visit each day, where I extend ideas that I only had time to touch on briefly in class.

I pledge to improve myself as a teacher, keeping the above concepts in my mind. But, teaching benefits me as well. It keeps me mentally and physically healthy. If I can serve students by teaching them, then there is no other activity that I would find more worthwhile.

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