

Learning is a journey. It requires exploration, investigation, and determination. It is exhilarating and terrifying; fulfilling and frustrating. Learning encompasses all areas of life. As an educator, my mission is to facilitate this journey, both in my areas of expertise and more generally, by helping young adults find their place in the world.

This duality of purpose is at the heart of my teaching choices and philosophy. It has shaped the three primary pillars of my teaching; get to know the students, help them know themselves, and impart the necessary disciplinary information and skills.

Everything begins by developing relationships with the students. Who are they; what are their goals; what are their priorities? These questions are essential to working with collegiate students. They have made the decision to put their time, money, and energy into a college education; they deserve to be known. I have found it is the small things that foster connections. In class, I welcome students by name and use the first few minutes of class to ask about their days. I assign personal reflections to hear their voice and thoughts. I invite students to my office hours and especially encourage non-majors to stop by, say hello, and let me know if they have any need of my support. In advising and upper level courses, I have one-on-one meetings discussing their backgrounds, goals, and planning their educational journeys. I attend their other campus events and participate in college activities where they see me outside of the classroom. These actions, the moments of connection, can be a lifeline for students negotiating this chapter of their lives.

Of course, knowing a student is predicated on them knowing themselves. Often their self-reflection and understanding are still developing. Many of my students have come from systems or experiences that rewarded giving the “right answer” instead of engaging with the questions presented, evaluating the material given, and finding innovative and creative approaches and solutions. Focusing on the “right answer” can breed pressure for perfection. It can lead to a lack of resilience, an emphasis on product over process and an environment antithetical to true learning. As an educator, I foster an environment where students can try things and take risks. I clearly lay out learning objectives and expectations, but I leave as much flexibility as possible. I purposely create lessons that investigate intersectionality or ask students to tie their interests or experiences to the subject matter. Engagement and understanding increases when students see how the material impacts their everyday life.

I also utilize contract grading to further encourage students to learn about and know themselves. Contract grading is a pedagogical approach that asks students to grade themselves (in consultation with me) based on agreed expectations given at the beginning of the semester. It pushes students to focus on how they are approaching material and evaluate their strengths and areas for growth. It can be a challenging process and gives

some students a great sense of discomfort. However, they have also shared that being asked to evaluate themselves and engage with material differently has had positive impacts in all areas of their study, including my disciplinary expertise.

Finally, I focus on my area of expertise. I believe studying theatre is of huge value to any student. It requires research, analysis, communication, creativity, innovation, empathy, creative problem solving, resilience, and persistence. These are skills every student can benefit from and utilize in any arena or career. There are also the practical skills and techniques that students need if they choose to enter the field professionally. It is my job to develop and deliver lessons, activities, and projects that introduce, address, and develop all these skills. To do so, I employ a variety of approaches including lecture, demonstrations, group projects, and experiential learning. I communicate learning objectives so students know why the material is important. I provide feedback and communicate industry standards to orient students in the expectations and motivate their growth. Perhaps most importantly, I strive to provide an environment of acceptable risk; one which values trying, effort, and progress as a path to excellence. These steps, this type of environment allows students to embrace their educational journey.

Every person deserves to learn. It is a life-long pursuit. My mission is to facilitate the journey while students are with me and instill a love of learning that carries them forward in the future chapters of their lives.