

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
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Fall of 2020 I had an unusual group of students in my STAT200 class-around a half-dozen women who had returned to college after starting their families, and were attending college full-time with anywhere from two to eight children at home. One woman was a veteran, another an immigrant. One woman had eight children, and had taken my class because her eldest son was my student a few years previously. These women had three things in common: (1) they were determined to finish college, (2) they came to class every day and turned in every assignment on time, if not early, and (3) they were all struggling financially-juggling children, school, jobs and budgets. Every morning before class they got together to share information on cheap recipes, where the best deals were on food, and where to find cheap or free dental and eye care. Every morning (and it was a 9 a.m. class) I could see the exhaustion on their faces-the worst morning was when the mother of 8 came into class after being up all night holding the family dog, who was dying. THESE ARE MY STUDENTS, and I've spent my twenty-one years at Penn State teaching to them, and for them, and for my students who work two or three jobs to survive, and for my students who start their own hair salons while still managing, somehow, to stay in school.

One of my favorite movies is *Ratatouille*, the animated Disney feature about a Parisian rat who becomes a famous chef. The tag-line of the movie, *anyone can cook*, is my teaching motto-not that I teach cooking. As noted by the character Ego at the end of the movie that phrase, *anyone can cook*, doesn't mean LITERALLY *anyone can cook*, it means that a great cook can come from anywhere. Similarly, it's not that I believe that anyone can be a good student, but that a GOOD STUDENT can come from anywhere. And I take a great deal of pride in the fact that many of my students, while they may not have continued their careers in the field of Criminal Justice, have become exceptional in their fields. And, in order to help my students-who have varied backgrounds, resources, and time commitments, I have, over my two decades at this institution, taken a unique and non-traditional approach to education, which is effective, inclusive, compassionate, and frankly just a little bit punk rock.

The Eisenhower award requires that I address my innovation in teaching. I am innovative, but probably not in the conventional sense. What do I do that no one else does (well, hardly anyone else)? My exams are all open book, open note, and students can take them as often as they want. How is that innovative? I believe that exams should not be used to weed out weak students. Exams should not be used to punish students who didn't work hard enough. Exams should be a form of SELF-ASSESSMENT, with students allowed to continue to improve their mastery of a topic, and to be rewarded for improving it. And, I allow, nay encourage them, to work with other students-to consult-to compare and to teach each other. A number of years ago I had a staff member come to me to tell me they saw my students talking to each other in the computer lab while taking a test. I asked 'What were they talking about?' 'Criminal justice' they replied. 'Exactly, they are talking about what they are learning-which is what we want them to do-to touch, to feel, to get enthusiastic about the material. How I innovate is not through the use of new technology, or new rubrics. It is about encouraging my students to get their hands dirty, to feel the theories, to have statistical tables talk to them and spark further inquiry.

This statement also must address equity and inclusion in teaching. Again, I am an innovator in this regard. As I stated in my opening paragraph, my students tend towards poor, immigrant, first-generation, non-traditional, underrepresented and all of the other things that put them at a disadvantage compared to traditional Research I institutions. For many years I have had most of my course materials available on-line. This gave me an advantage when the University switched to only remote course delivery in March of 2020. With the gradual return of students and faculty to the

classroom I noticed that, particularly in Fall of 2021, more and more students required more and more flexibility with regards to course delivery mode. Requiring in-person attendance was simply not feasible as more and more students were quarantined either due to their own or a family member's illness. Requiring in-person attendance was simply not feasible as more and more students were working more and more hours, including rotating and split shifts due to the labor shortage. And requiring in-person attendance is simply not feasible as more and more students and their families are facing financial crises due to worsening inflation-working extra hours to afford food or not being able to afford to keep putting gas in their cars to physically come to campus. With an eye to providing an education to ALL my students, I offer my in-person classes in three modes: in-person synchronous, zoom synchronous, and WEB asynchronous. For my students with children, they can stay caught up. For my students in the Army Reserves they can miss a week or two and still stay on track in class. For my students facing any number of personal, social, financial, medical or other exigencies, they have many ways to listen to/participate in lectures and discussions. They don't have to worry about missing class if their dog died overnight. I feel that all of us, at some point, require accommodations. It is my mission to make sure ALL my students can succeed, regardless of whatever is going on in their lives at the time.

In addition to being an active researcher I am discipline coordinator for the University College for Social Sciences and Education and Program Coordinator for the Criminal Justice program at my campus. In the former role I am quite often called upon to discuss with faculty their courses, what is working for them, and what isn't. My best advice: 'to thine own self be true'. I often remind faculty that they should feel free to try different pedagogical strategies; however, if something doesn't match with their teaching style, don't stick with it just because it's the latest thing. I remind them that my style works for me, but especially for Criminal Justice faculty who have worked in the Criminal Justice field, my casual approach to due dates, attendance, cheating and even how should students address me-it isn't going to work for them. I feel that the best thing I can do for the sixty some faculty I work with as Discipline Coordinator is to be true to their personalities. Right now, I feel that my greatest contribution to undergraduate education in University College is the continued development of the Criminal Justice program across the campuses, and particularly the forging of relationships between individual programs leading to increased collaboration in course scheduling, assessment, and student development (such as directing students to courses of particular interest that may be being taught at another campus, which can be shared with them via zoom. This truly enhances the experience for students at small campuses, where faculty are logistically unable to offer everything students in the major may be interested in.

I think the strongest evidence of my mentoring of teaching faculty is the fact that two of my former students are now teaching line faculty in the Criminal Justice program at other campuses. Both were inspired by my teaching style to go into the profession as well. I continue to work with them as they progress through their careers as teaching faculty at Penn State University College, and I have no doubt that I will see more of my former students not only teaching at Penn State, but at other institutions, perhaps running into them at professional conferences or meetings.

I want to cycle back in this statement to my STAT200 student with eight children who came in at 9:05 in the morning after being up all night holding her dog while he died (while simultaneously getting I think 6 children off to school). This woman was a superstar, eventually winning the campus research fair first prize, working under one of our Psychology faculty. I don't know where she is now, but I like to imagine her in graduate school someone, perhaps working to become a therapist for women facing stressful life events. And I truly wished that, at the time she was in my class, I'd had my tri-modal course model in place so she didn't have to come in after what had to be a very difficult night in her life. This is my goal, my mission in teaching: to ensure that all my students (and this is especially important at the University College campuses) regardless of whatever stuff they have going on in their lives, know they can succeed, and that I understand, I've been there, and I'm going to do what I can to help them reach their goals.