

### **Teaching Philosophy – Andrew J. Mowen**

The craft of teaching and learning is at once a humbling and gratifying experience. My evolution as a teacher, advisor, and mentor have been inspired by numerous faculty and by students. My core teaching philosophy (or belief if you will) is this... students generally want to succeed and grow as individuals. They want contribute to something bigger than themselves – something that draws upon their inherent talents and passions. It is up to us as teachers to spark, steer, and facilitate student learning regarding these “somethings.” Different students learn in different ways, so it’s important for a given class to provide multiple options and assignments to connect with these different learning styles. I’m a strong believer in “learn by both observing and doing” particularly as related to my subject area (park facility operations and agency management). I’m a strong proponent of scenario-based exercises that tackle thorny issues in the profession. I’m also keen to ensure that students experience a breadth of professional experiences in the class. These experiences often include personal interactions with industry professionals at different stages of their careers. It’s important for students to be exposed not only to the inspiring and fun part of our career/industry, but also the sobering realities regarding the operating environment. I do not shy away from these issues. While this may steer some students away, it ultimately pays off by preparing creative and resilient park and recreation professional workforce. My evolution and growth as a college teacher was informed by past mentors and is currently inspired by a new generation of digitally-native faculty and students. There are a few examples that stand out. Mercifully, I’m bound to a one-page teaching philosophy, so I’ll share just a few people/moment intersections that have guided my instructional thinking and practice.

My freshman Chemistry professor, Frank Kristine gave of his time and ears when I wanted to switch from an engineering major to a career path closer to my values and passions. While he wasn’t formally my advisor, he did many things a good mentor would do. He suggested ways to systematically learn more about myself and my suitability with other careers, he suggested other faculty for me to seek out for diverse perspectives, and encouraged me to apply for the Honors Program. He taught me how important it was to be accessible, to provide instrumental support (not just encouragement), and to not pre-judge students’ life decisions. Another professor, Deborah Kerstetter, mentored me as graduate teaching assistant/instructor. At the time, she was perhaps our major’s most respected teacher and advisor, so I thought applying her overall teaching approach, lessons, readings, etc. would be effective. It wasn’t – at least not for me and how I tried to incorporate it. In discussing my struggles with her, she observed I was a “probably a bit too uptight in the classroom” and was trying to be too much like other her or other senior faculty. “Don’t be afraid to let yourself come out in your teaching - whether that be course planning, project management, and advising,” she said. Her simple suggestion allowed me to embrace my own teaching and mentoring style – something my students could sense and respond to.

As a professor, I’ve found students to be my best teachers. They challenge me to think in different ways, they share insights, and their different learning styles, life situations, and personalities stretch and compel me expand my versatility as a teacher and advisor. Students have taught me that, when given the opportunity, they can be their own agents of change and growth. I think back to students who were struggling to complete course assignments or even come to class. A personal and compassionate conversation with those students usually uncovered extenuating circumstances leading to their predicament and gave me the opportunity provide them a second chance with shared accountabilities. More often than not, these students successfully recovered from their circumstance and completed the course. After graduation, they often share their appreciation for my concern and for sticking with them throughout the class. Again, these were practices and philosophies of my past mentors.

In summary, providing diverse options for learning; being accessible, authentic, and empathetic; being true to your own teaching style/strengths; offering instrumental support to students; and embracing new teaching methods and opportunities characterize my teaching philosophy.