

## **Teaching Philosophy—Jaime Schultz, Kinesiology**

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I used to feel a little embarrassed to tell people that I teach about sports. It seemed awfully trivial compared to my colleagues who teach about racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, violence, religion, or social change. How can athletics rank with the vital issues of health, morbidity, and mortality, or the pressing humanitarian crises of war, poverty, displacement, and homelessness? Over time, however, I've become increasingly convinced that sport provides a fascinating and accessible vehicle for getting at those very same issues. In fact, it *is* those same issues. For better or for worse, sport has power. It matters.

Sport certainly matters to the Penn State community. Some students are avid fans, while others express indifference and even antipathy toward athletics. I love those conflicting opinions, for they feed endless discussions about what sport means and why it is so important to our society. The topic offers common ground on which to have important conversations, most of which stretch far beyond the field of play. For example, the life and times of Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight boxing champion (1908-1915), acquaints students with the history of U.S. racism, segregation, and anti-miscegenation laws, which, in turn, contributes much to current debates about marriage equality. Together, we analyze sex and gender through baseball and softball; international politics in the 1972 “Munich Massacre”; disability rights with “murderball”; and body-image pressures via sports marketing and media.

I love what I teach, but content is only part of the equation. Even more important is *how* I teach and *who* I teach, and I work hard to make everything centered on student learning and development. I try to structure courses that allow any student to be successful, provided s/he is willing to do the work. This means articulating clear expectations, developing concise rubrics, and being available for questions or concerns. I provide introductions for every topic and “guided study” questions for each assessment. There are no tricks and no surprises when it comes to the foundational knowledge necessary for higher-level thinking. I ask students to participate regularly and, to allow for different expressive styles and personalities, they can do so in one of three ways: verbally (in class); in writing (using online discussion boards); and virtually (through Twitter). I make sure to have a presence in each platform and the results of these discussions have been extraordinary. I am constantly astounded by what students have to say, their interactions with one another, and the ways they articulate and relate course material.

Equally astounding are the results of their “significant learning experiences” (Fink, 2003). These are typically team-based activities that encourage student engagement through the application, integration, and adaptation of foundational knowledge in new and meaningful ways. In major course projects, they design online “museum exhibits” about controversial issues, and debate topics that range from banning helmets in football to whether the American Medical Association should classify obesity as a disease. Learning experiences also include a variety of low-stakes “Reflective Exercises” that include techniques such as two-minute papers, concept maps, media analyses, and what I call V.I.S.E. (Validation, Intrigue, Skepticism, Enlightenment). There are no correct answers to many of the questions I pose. Students often find this frustrating, but I am convinced that it gets them to think about familiar topics in unfamiliar ways, exercise their “critical sensibilities” (a cornerstone of the class), and struggle collaboratively, all of which creates a sense of community that extends beyond the classroom.

In short, everything I do is designed to draw students in, to provoke them, and to ask them to actively participate in their academic and personal development because, in the end, it’s the *who* that makes this profession so great. For this reason, it is important to me that students know that I care about and appreciate them, both as learners and as people. In large lectures, I make sure that I know the names and at least one meaningful detail about each student before the semester ends. I arrive to class early, stay late, and respond to every email within 24 hours. I encourage students to visit me in my office and keep notes on each interaction. I do the same in smaller classes, where students must meet with me individually at least four times each semester. I also have a consistent practice of “good stuff,” which entails writing to students who are performing well, making an effort to perform better, engaging with the material in meaningful ways, or demonstrating signs improvement. It’s about catching them doing something good and praising them for their efforts. I believe this fosters a sense of connection and lets them know that they matter. And I’ve learned that good stuff almost always yields more good stuff.

I am honored to be considered for a teaching award. Penn State has an abundance of great teachers and I’m privileged to be in their company. Even more, though, I’m fortunate to work with our students. They light me up, make me proud, and remind me how infinitely grateful I am to do what I do.