

“Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves” (Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*). My teaching philosophy seeks to connect me with my students to facilitate connections between the content and their world.

Professors are experts and experts can be intimidating. Since many of my students are first-year, first-generation to college, I am intentional about being approachable. It’s important for students to realize, and healthy for teachers to remember today’s expert was yesterday’s novice. I often share my first-gen experiences as I seek to build community by learning students’ names, integrating opportunities for them to get to know each other, facilitating collaboration in- and out-of-class, reaching out when a student is absent, and encouraging office visits. These behaviors demonstrate caring because many students won’t care what you know, or want to learn it, until they know you care.

While I am passionate about my fields, some students enter accounting or microeconomics with trepidation. Fortunately, enthusiasm can be contagious. One way I spur interest is to pique curiosity through classroom activities like a cookie market or “manufacturing” greeting cards to demonstrate course principles in action. Integrating student-selected topics is another strategy promoting authentic, personalized learning. When we are interested we pay closer attention, make more connections, and work harder. My goal is for *all* students to connect the content to their lived experiences. Thus, I worked with our college’s Anti-racism Across the Curriculum (AAC) group to incorporate race and antiracism content as a response to the white-centric focus in the popular textbooks. Learning is enhanced when diverse perspectives are recognized, valued, and given voice.

Because first- and second-year students sometimes underestimate the time and effort needed to learn, I begin introductory courses with detailed learning scaffolds: study topic lists, timelines, and practice sets. As we progress, I shift some of this responsibility toward students via student-created project plans, self-assessments, and peer feedback. In advanced courses, I share some decision-making regarding topic weights, deadlines, and most recently, in the use of generative A.I.. Throughout, I strive to integrate a variety of means for students to demonstrate learning, recognizing that neurodiversity presents in every course. Aware of the semester’s rhythms, I avoid exams and major assessments during intellectual lulls and high-stress periods like the week before break or right after THON. I also schedule material *students* find interesting near the end of the term, when motivation is likely to wane.

Strong connections require perseverance. Thus, I seek to balance high expectations with kindness. To promote persistence, my courses strategically include low-stakes assessments and allow revised submissions. My expectation for formative work is a “good faith effort.” This allows students to wrestle with content and receive timely, specific, feedback without risking their course grade. Allowing revised submission supports learning, emphasizing process over product. These practices promote intrinsic motivation and tenacity, encouraging students to safely take risks in their learning. In this environment, mistakes aren’t failures; they are an integral part of growth and mastery.

In sum, my teaching philosophy and practices support subject-matter learning while growing students’ confidence, skills, and ownership of their learning. The process begins at first meeting, when students discuss the characteristics of their ideal learning environment. These insights become our “Jointly Determined Class Norms & Expectations” in the syllabus. From the start, we connect as a learning community. Within each class I strive to engage, inspire, and encourage connections to the content, each other, and their world. While content learning is a primary goal, my greatest hope is that as they master content, students will grow as learners to “learn to weave a world for themselves.”