

Omar F. El-Gayar
College of Business and Information Systems
Dakota State University

Philosophy of Teaching

*"If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the
threshold of your own mind"*
Kahlil Gibran

The purpose of learning is to incorporate new information or skills into the learner's existing knowledge structure and to make knowledge accessible. Learning is a social process, inherently complex, and is in itself the subject of ongoing research. However, at the core are the keywords "incorporate" and "accessible".

My goals as a teacher are to inspire, empower, enhance, and ultimately facilitate my students' learning. Students learn, however, teachers are the catalysts to their learning experience. While this may sound simplistic, it is not, and I do not take it lightly. The teaching process is multi-faceted. The following is a summary of concepts underlying my quest to help my students achieve high standards of learning and development:

- Active involvement. In order for students to be able to incorporate new information and make it accessible, i.e., learn, students need to be actively involved in class. As the Chinese proverb goes, "Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand". In that respect, I try to maintain a very lively and interactive classroom and encourage my students to be actively involved through questions, case studies and creative exercises for stimulating class discussions.
- Examples and real-world applications. To emphasize the concepts presented, I always try to incorporate examples and real-world application. I seek to use a simple plan, yet many examples.
- Feedback. Assignments and exams assess the student's understanding of the subject matter. However, without adequate and timely feedback, students have no means of verifying their progress and learning from their mistakes.
- Access. Providing access to my expertise is paramount. I actively encourage dialog with students during office hours, by appointment, telephone, and email. I have also supplemented my courses with web boards to facilitate online discussions.
- Challenging. I feel that as a teacher, I need to continuously challenge myself to try to deliver course material in different ways and from different perspectives. On the other hand, students should be challenged by the teacher and the course material *"to the thresholds of their own minds"*.
- Caring. I firmly believe that one cannot be a good teacher without having feelings of warm affection toward one's students and a genuine desire to impart to them what he believes to be of value.

- Individualism. I recognize the individuality of my students. At the start of the semester, I make a conscious effort to memorize my students' names. I respect the privacy of my students. I enjoy listening to their stories and value their input and the experience they bring to class.
- Flexibility. Although I have a syllabus with a course outline, I always emphasize to my students that the course outline is for reference purposes and that it is subject to change to accommodate their particular needs. Moreover, while I require my students to adhere to specific deadlines for assignments and projects, I am always open to accommodate special circumstances.

In my pursuit of excellence in teaching, I engage myself in a process of "critical reflection" - a continuous process of self-examination through four distinct lenses:

- Autobiographical reflection.
- Students' eyes. I very much value the input of my students. I encourage students to express their comments about their progress, my teaching ability, and the way the course is structured. It is always a positive experience to address their concerns and make changes as needed.
- Colleagues' perceptions and experiences.
- Literature of the profession.

Furthermore, I perceive teaching and research as complementary and must be integrated. Scholarship, broadly defined, is a prerequisite for teaching. To excel in teaching, I find it important to remain professionally active by participating in seminars and conferences, maintaining an active research agenda, and developing consulting relationships both within and outside of the academic community. This allows me to return to the classroom with new ideas and vibrancy for the discipline. It also enhances my capabilities as a mentor and facilitator.

In conclusion, I enjoy teaching, interacting with students and will continue to refine my teaching practices and to grow as a teacher/scholar. My ultimate fulfillment is achieved when I see one of my former students succeed in getting a new job or admission to a professional school.