

Teaching Philosophy

My philosophy of teaching college students centers on the idea of partnership. By this I mean that my students and I must work together to be successful in achieving our learning goals.

This is a simple concept – some might say too simple for a teaching philosophy – but many students are not used to having their teachers as partners. In high school, students are used to seeing teachers as authority figures, people who make demands and then hand out grades based on how well the demands are met. This may be needed in high school, but in college, where students are tossed into an environment with increased freedom and responsibility, students should learn that, ultimately, they are accountable for their education.

Having students as partners in the classroom does not mean that the students make up the rules. It can mean that the teacher may consult the students when establishing some rules. For example, I will occasionally ask students for their input when deciding on a date for an exam or the deadline for an assignment. Yes, some will try to push the dates back as far as they can, but when I explain that pushing back the dates will increase their workload later, they come up with reasonable choices.

Here are some other ways the partnership works in my classes:

- I don't give points for attendance or deduct points for absences. I explain to students that they are responsible for what they get out of class; therefore, their grades will be based only on the work they do and how well they understand the material presented in class. As partners in learning, I am responsible for presenting them with material and assessing their mastery of it. They are responsible for learning the material and demonstrating that they have learned it.
- I encourage students to discuss their grades with me, even if they disagree with them or are unclear about how the grades are determined.
- I sometimes ask for my students' input on textbooks, assignments and teaching techniques. Of course, the input comes after they have used the textbooks, completed the assignments and observed the techniques, but their comments are valuable for future classes.

Students come to WKU from a variety of backgrounds, and they have an even wider variety of experiences on which to draw when they are in the classroom. It is not unusual for one of my courses to include traditional freshmen, SJ&B majors, non-majors, international students, Vietnam veterans, athletes, people with disabilities and honors students.

Such diversity requires the use of a variety of teaching techniques that complement the partnership philosophy. My teaching repertoire includes lectures, slide presentations, in-class discussions, in-class assignments, Blackboard assignments, group work, and video presentations. And depending on the course, the subject and the class size, I will use any number of these methods, often with input from students regarding their effectiveness.

A partnership philosophy also is useful for me because of the ever-changing nature of journalism and professional communications. Even before the development of the internet and other technologies, I tried to be honest with my students about the shortcomings in my knowledge and experience. To be sure, I have plenty to teach them about mass communication, but students know almost instinctively

that no one is an expert in all areas of the profession. And now that the industry is in what seems to be a permanent upheaval, our knowledge gaps are more obvious than ever before. Students are eager to learn from us what we know, and they are just as eager to join with us in learning those things that we must learn together.

My philosophy does not let me avoid the typical responsibilities of teaching, such as developing assignments and grading homework, but it does fit my personality, and it has helped me stay abreast of many of the changes in professional communication. Finally, my partnership with students has the added benefit of letting the students see that I, too, am a learner in the classroom. It is a role that demonstrates how learning is something we should do long after we've graduated from college.