



CASEY ALT
STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My pedagogical philosophy is founded on the belief that students learn best when they take active ownership of their education. I view the classroom not so much as a vehicle for faithful knowledge transmission but rather as an experimental space for collaborative knowledge production. While it is undeniably important for students to master the rudimentary concepts of their field, I deem it equally necessary to empower them with a passion for self-directed research. While this latter approach is perhaps more difficult to accomplish, particularly at the undergraduate level, I have adopted several pedagogical practices for encouraging students to pursue greater agency in their own university careers.

For me, the most crucial aspect in motivating students toward ownership of the academic process is treating them with an appropriate degree of respect. Expectations often shape how people behave, particularly in the impressionable context of the classroom. For this reason, I prefer to view students as colleagues-in-training, with the explicit understanding that this privilege carries with it the responsibility to afford one another the same professional courtesy and respect for intellectual diversity. As such, one of my primary jobs in the classroom is to perform professionalism such that it permeates all interactions and fosters the confidence necessary for intellectual risk-taking.

In a similar vein, I consider it equally important to respect students' time and energy by only assigning tasks which produce some useful product for their long-term development. I have always abhorred homework for homework's sake and make it a policy to avoid assigning any task for which I am not prepared to provide each student at least one page of written feedback. I equally dislike major course assignments whose ultimate destination is the darkness of a filing cabinet and consciously design course requirements that can be integrated easily into public discourse or usage. I have repeatedly noticed in both my own and my colleagues' teaching experiences that requiring students to make their work publicly available—whether as online publications, freely downloadable podcasts or videos, or functional software tools—not only increases the quality of the work but also prompts students to view themselves as active agents within international discursive communities.

A third strategy for cultivating student investment is the creation of opportunities for students to teach one another. In large lecture or seminar settings, such methods often assume the form of weekly student presentations or student discussion leaders. Regardless of the subject, I feel that it is a far more productive use of course time if students spend fifty minutes struggling together towards a shared understanding of some challenging course concept than for me to preempt the possibility for self-discovery by spelling out my opinion in five minutes. Within smaller, project-based courses, I am a great believer in collaborative assignments. Well-designed and appropriate collaborative projects are both humbling and empowering and teach students the benefits of intellectual diversity and collective action. Within each of these academic contexts, I repeatedly emphasize and demonstrate the power of peer critique as the richest resource available in any academic pursuit.

Fourthly, I intentionally create and teach courses that exist at the borders of established disciplines and methodologies. Whether such courses might span traditionally disparate disciplines, such as biology and media technologies, or straddle closely aligned disciplines with different academic modalities, such as media theory and media production, operating within these zones of ambiguity helps liberate students from expectations of demonstrable expertise and opens new possibilities for original thought and collective experimentation. Exposing

students to the specific research norms, methodologies, and argumentation styles of other disciplines also provokes a deeper understanding of one's own discipline as well as larger considerations of disciplinarity in general. Similarly, I have discovered in my own work as well as in my teaching that requiring students to simultaneously confront theory and practice within the same context often creates a productive tension that increases intellectual rigor in both areas.

More than anything, I seek to convince my students that academic investigation need not imply an absence of passion nor should historical significance be cast in opposition to personal relevance. I hope to compel them to critically engage the multiple technologies that mediate their everyday lives, whether they be instant messaging, Facebook, blogs, YouTube, or videogames. I strive to instill within them the intellectual audacity to move beyond convention and cliché and embrace the scholarly process on their own unique terms.

I have been lucky in my teaching career to have already enjoyed terrific pedagogical successes, many of which I owe to the inexhaustible generosity of my own teachers and mentors, including my mother, a life-long high school English teacher. They have shown me that teaching can be a wonderfully rewarding profession if one approaches it as a continuous process of self-improvement and learning. I am extremely committed to this endeavor and am excited to continue inspiring a similar love of academic exploration in future generations of students.