

Ryan Sullivan Teaching Philosophy

I don't believe there is only one "true" philosophy to teaching. I believe every class has different personalities and abilities which the teacher must be able to adapt to under the circumstances. For example, some classes may have more outgoing personalities which require an increased amount of group activities and participation. Others may be more laid back and math oriented which would require a more structured class environment. A talented teacher should be able to tailor his class organization for what fits best with that particular class. Just as a football or basketball coach should not get too fixated on playing one strategy against their competition, a teacher should not get too fixated on only one way of teaching. This being said, if I had to describe my *general* teaching philosophy in three words, they would be **practicality**, **approachability**, and **dedication**.

Practicality

In high school, I had an economics teacher who would always state that he would have a reply for anyone who felt the material we were going over in class that day was not useful in the real world. Unquestionably, every couple days someone would wonder why we needed to know about interest rates, inflation, or whatever was being discussed that day. Sure enough, he would ALWAYS have an answer as to how his material could be applied in their everyday lives. This teacher had an incredible insight as to what education is supposed to be about. I try to tailor my class to this thought process. The idea being that the material learned in class should be able to be utilized in the real world. Thus, I try to include current events and typical household problems students run into in their everyday lives in my class lectures and discussions.

Approachability

Part of being a good teacher is the ability to engage students on an intellectual level as well as on a personal basis. When I look back on my favorite teachers in high school and college, I find that every single one of them related to me on a personal level. Luckily, the two classes I have taught have been small enough where I am on a first name basis with the majority of my students. I try to make it a point to be friendly as well as keep their interest in my lectures through funny stories (sometimes they are funnier to me than to them) or through personal experiences. Giving a little extra effort towards students goes a long way towards keeping their interest. For example, I regularly help students outside of my office hours as a convenience for them. Additionally, I have had many students come to me for advice on future classes to take, trying to decide on a major, or just stopping by to chat. I feel that being easily approachable is a must for any teacher who is dedicated to their work. Which leads us to...

Dedication

If a teacher expects an extraordinary amount of effort from their students, he must be prepared to give an extraordinary amount of effort himself. Students can tell if an instructor cares about his class

or whether he is breezing through the material without regard for their students' educational development. We have all had teachers who do not care if their students learn the material and are there just to pick up a paycheck. These are the classes where students stop coming to class and put in less hours studying, because they are turned off by the learning environment. It takes time and effort to come up with new teaching material and not simply using your same old notes repetitively. However, the really good teachers put in a couple of extra hours each week to look up current events that fit well with the material they are teaching or maybe trying a new activity that might ignite discussion in class. When reviewing my teaching notes, I always ask myself if there is a better way of teaching this material or whether the way I have previously taught this section seemed to work well. Teaching is not a static process and it is up to the teacher to make the class engaging and interesting. I believe if the teacher is dedicated towards teaching an interesting and thought stimulating class, then his students will respond in kind.

I truly believe we as teachers have one of the best jobs on the planet. What other profession shapes a young person's life more than ours? If you think about this question hard, your answer should be very few, if any. It is a privilege to be able to guide college students' way of thinking as they shape into young professional adults. I strive to better these students through dedication, approachability, and through the use of practical examples affecting their everyday lives.