

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

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Although index cards, brown bag lunches, and students switching to math majors may not seem to have a connection, all three have been part of my teaching experience record. The index cards serve as a symbol of my desire to foster a positive, engaged environment; the brown bag lunches highlight my commitment to my students in and out of the classroom; and each student who has changed their major has cited my enthusiasm as a primary reason. Like most math teachers, I want to ensure real understanding of mathematical concepts and foster critical thinking skills, but I also want the students to enjoy class and become excited about learning math. I achieve these goals by creating a welcoming and communicating environment, proving my dedication to their education, and bringing enthusiasm to the classroom.

My desire to foster a positive environment begins the first class period when, after introducing and sharing information about myself, I have each student fill out an index card and present something about his/herself. This process helps me quickly learn each student's name, but it also serves a greater purpose as a way to begin opening the door for future classroom participation. In my experience, many students are intimidated by their math classes. Having the students interact and engage in the first class helps to counteract those fears, and makes it more likely that students will feel comfortable asking questions and engaging in discussion during future classes. During the first class period, I also spend time going over the syllabus clarifying expectations for both students and myself. Simply communicating these expectations establishes mutual respect for the rest of the semester. I continue to support this environment throughout the semester by encouraging students to form their own study groups, by breaking the students into small groups during class to work on short exercises, and by positively reinforcing participation by thanking the students by name.

I truly care about my students' success, and I prove this to them through my dedication in and outside of the classroom. Before class, I review each topic and look for areas where students may experience confusion. I try to think of several ways of addressing an idea, and I prepare numerous examples to clarify the objectives of the section. I select exercises that build on the presented material, that move toward future lectures, and that improve critical thinking skills. I present my prepared lesson plans in an organized manner, since the abstract nature of math can make it inherently difficult to follow. I also stick to the expectations I have set in the syllabus of returning assignments, quizzes, and tests by the next class period. After class, I work with the students one-on-one or in smaller groups during my office hours. My first semester teaching Calculus for Business, my office hours were scheduled over the lunch hour, and I encouraged students to come, bring their brown bag lunch, and work while I was available for questions. Five to ten students came weekly, and we worked out problems together on the board.

Finding enjoyment in the classroom and the material is what finally solidifies the learning process. Enthusiasm is a contagious emotion, and I aim to bring my passion for mathematics and teaching, my positive outlook, and my animated personality to every interaction with students. From the start, many students are certain that math is boring, that they cannot learn math, and that they will never need math in their careers. However, after a few weeks, some are actually enjoying math, though more importantly, learning more than they thought they were capable. They are smiling and participating with me, and finally starting to understand how the problem solving techniques can be used in their non-math realms. In fact, four students – one student for every semester I've taught

– have switched their majors to math and cited my enthusiasm and encouragement as a primary reason. I celebrate the students successes, and when difficulties do arise, I work patiently alongside them to overcome their struggles. I never say problems are easy; even the easiest problems can be challenging to at least one student. By supporting the students through hardships, celebrating their victories, and confronting problems with a positive attitude, the students feel more ready to address the challenges of mathematics. While not all the students enjoy math by the end of class, I aim to make certain they have learned the material, they understand the problem solving techniques, and they have enjoyed the class!