Teaching Statement

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I believe very strongly that teaching is a vital part of the academic process. In this statement, I will try to detail what I feel are the five main ideas that I follow in my teaching. It is my goal that, upon reading this statement, the reader will have a clear idea of what it would like to be a student in my classroom and will have a grasp on how I approach my preparation.

**Know the students’ background:** It is my belief that every class is different, and that knowing the backgrounds of the students is of utmost importance, especially in more advanced undergraduate courses. In smaller classes, I like to start the first day by having each student introduce themselves, give their major and class year. If it’s a more advanced course I also like to ask about their favorite math class so far. This provides critical information that will help me plan for how to best run future classes (it also lets me learn the students’ names). I think it’s important to frequently follow up with feedback; for example, instead of just collecting homework, I like to ask which problems were the trickier ones and which ones were straightforward. Of course, a lot of this is not always practical in classes with large enrollments (typically large lectures), which is why I believe strongly that larger classes need smaller recitation sections to accompany them.

**Stress the important concepts:** Students in the classroom are not always in a position to be able to distinguish what is the most important concepts in any given lecture. While ideally students would absorb everything that is told, I believe that it is unreasonable to expect every student to fully recall every detail. In my teachings, I believe in the “rule of three”: Any concept or technique that we want all students to remember after a lecture is over must be said in some way at least three times, and one of these ways must be written. The stronger students will of course take in more, but will still appreciate knowing which ideas are the most important.

**Make sure students are engaged:** I believe strongly that student-instructor interaction is important. I like to frequently stop and ask students if they have any questions. Since students do not always want to admit that they do have questions or that they don’t understand, I like to anticipate in advance what the questions might be, and if I am met with silence I will ask these questions to the students myself. This is because if I am met with silence, it can be difficult to distinguish between confusion on their part and a true lack of questions, and asking questions of my own can help reveal the answer. Even in the second case, my questions may cause them to realize there are other issues they hadn’t considered, and will encourage them to think more about the material.

**Be available:** I believe that teaching does not end when the classroom time is over. Students will inevitably have questions, and I believe that clear methods of out-of-classroom contact are important. I believe that office hours should be available with a clear set of times for walkins (that require no prior appointment) as well as by appointment. Prior to exams, I think it is important that extra walkin hours should be made (I usually offer double), as well as a group review session for questions (since students may want to hear what kind of questions other students are asking). At all times in the course, students should be able to expect replies to e-mail inquiries within a reasonable amount of time.
Be prepared: I believe that proper preparation is the most important part of my teaching. All of the notes I give are prepared in advance. I also think it’s important that the notes not just be a regurgitation of the assigned textbook; any examples that I give are all my own. I always prepare both “core” notes that I will always get through, as well as “extra” notes that might, for instance, consist of additional examples. The extra notes are for when I gauge from students’ reactions or questions that a particular topic might need more thorough treatment. I believe also that there should be time allotted for questions, which can never be predicted in full, but I do try to anticipate in advance what these questions might be, and have notes prepared for them.

There are a variety of teaching styles, and I am not claiming that there is a one-style-fits-all approach to teaching. I have found that – for me – following the above guidelines seems to be effective, and the positive student feedback I’ve received supports this conclusion. Although every class is different, I believe that the five core principles described above will continue to motivate my teaching. Perhaps most importantly, I have found that taking my teaching seriously has been both an incredibly rewarding and enjoyable experience, and I hope to continue teaching as a career.