

Statement of Teaching Philosophy
J. Wesley Burnett
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As a former student of a liberal arts college I still value the intimate interaction between student and teacher. When I was an undergraduate student I valued the teachers that not expected but induced, as if through some force of will, an open dialogue in each lecture session. I respected the teachers who challenged me to work harder than I thought was possible. To this day I endeavor to apply this liberal arts sensibility to my own teaching. To this end my instincts tell me that the best way to lead a class of students is through serving them first. As such, my role as teacher is molded by my willingness to serve each and every one of my students.

This principle may seem too abstract to contain any real content; however, I believe that it is very practical. For example, if I am serving each student then it is expected, though perhaps not explicitly, that I thoroughly prepare for each lecture. For me, this means setting time aside before each lecture to focus solely on the material and the presentation at hand. This means looking for the latest current event or reading through a textbook to find a useful classroom illustration.

Beyond classroom preparation, I serve students by being available and accessible. I set aside time after lectures to be available for students while the material is fresh on their minds. I offer to be generous with office hours and reply to email queries within a twenty-four hour window.

As a professor now, teaching does not come readily to me. Each semester, my stomach reminds me before each class that standing before a group of eager minds is not a normal, biological activity. I have to come to learn that good teaching is not a natural gift, but requires thorough preparation and years of practice. I am not persuaded that good teaching requires crazy gimmicks or outlandish comedy, but rather an honest dialogue more attuned to my natural personality and dry sense of humor. I seek to improve my lecturing ability by soliciting feedback from my mentors and colleagues who I ask to sit in on lectures on occasion to offer written assessments.

At West Virginia University, the students know me as the economics professor that teaches the energy courses, a subject not too dissimilar from an environmental or resource economics course. Students might conjecture that as an energy/environmental economics expert these courses are easy and natural to develop, but the reality is a little more complex. Energy economics is a sub-field of economic theory that spans many disciplines within economics, but there is no standard textbook or course at another institution from which to refer. Therefore, the course is based on a few key textbooks and other sources, including peer-reviewed literature that I have accumulated over the past several years. The lack of reference materials can be exhausting at times, but it is also exhilarating as I am forced to find often complex material from the most recent peer-reviewed journal article and boil it down conceptually so that even an undergraduate student can fully grasp and appreciate the underlying economic theory.

My preferred manner of teaching is through Socratic dialogue, a teaching style that I learned through my main course of study as an undergraduate student. This is a teaching style that I have adopted in my smaller, upper-level courses. This is where there is a spark in the classroom. Students know not by expectation but through inducement to be prepared for class each day. As students become more familiar with the basic concepts of economic theory and the reality of environmental and energy policies there is generally a give and take in class – and a matching of wits. I enjoy to see the students' confidence increase when the light bulb goes on. For me this is the joy of teaching.

After only a few years as a teacher I only hope to continue to improve my pedagogy. I fully expect that teaching will continue to be fresh, challenging, scary, and rewarding throughout the rest of my career.