

Captain A
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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There's an old cliché that "Those who can, do, those who can't, teach." After two years of graduate school, I know that the old cliché is wrong. I had professors who were subject matter experts and leaders in the field. They were very skilled at doing – and yet they were terrible at teaching, at communicating to us how to do what they took for granted. I think teaching is a very difficult thing to do well – because it requires not only knowing your material, but also understanding how to communicate it to beginners, and how to relate to other people and motivate them to learn. On the other hand, I had teachers who were tremendous leaders and role models, who made it fun and important to attend class everyday. As I write this teaching philosophy, I find myself thinking about both groups of teachers.

As I prepare for my first semester in the classroom, I have more questions than answers. How do I find a balance in the interactions that I establish with my students? I want them to like me and like my class, but also respect my role as an authority figure. How do I make each class session enjoyable so that they are motivated to pay attention, and yet also focus them on learning and keep class time on topic? How do I make sure they learn key concepts, terms, and definitions – and at the same time teach them how to learn, how to think, how to function effectively in the world? How do I engage them in group activities and social interaction with their peers so that they learn to collaborate, and also teach them independence and responsibility so that they can achieve on their own? How many other questions will come up every day, in every class session?

I do know some things specifically, as I have learned from my own professors in school both what I do and don't want to do. I don't want to intimidate my students – while constructive criticism is part of the learning process, I can do it in a private and respectful way that helps my students to maintain their dignity and self-respect. So, I won't insult my students in class, laugh at “stupid questions,” and I'll try to remember that they are in class *because* they don't know many of the things I take for granted. I care about my subject and my material and I want to communicate that to my students – which means I will NOT spend the entire class standing in the front, talking in a monotone, as if I'm bored – I WILL try to move around the classroom to interact with students, vary my voice to show my excitement and interest, and keep class interesting with pictures, notes on the chalkboard, movie and sound clips that are relevant to the lesson, and hands-on activities. I want to remember that while each cadet is a student in my classroom, above all they are individual people, and I will try to get to know them. I'll learn their names, where they're from, ask about the activities and sports they're involved in, and make myself available whenever a student needs help, so that they know I care about them as people, not just desks (granted, that will be much easier for me with 18 per class than for some of my professors who had 100 per class).

I have not taught in a classroom before, but I think there are many ways in which I am already a teacher, and that by drawing on those experiences, I can improve my capabilities from day one. My experiences as a Platoon Leader and Company Commander were leadership positions, and leadership inherently includes teaching – developing the knowledge, abilities, and character of the soldiers in my command. As well, I will likely use some of the skills I have developed as a parent – the abilities to

channel someone's energy into an appropriate direction, to maintain order, and to discipline if needed, in an appropriate way.

I think it will be important for me to pay attention to the process, so that I purposefully improve as a teacher. With that in mind, I set the following goals:

(1) I will spend 10 minutes after each class reflecting on how the class went, and writing down notes about what did and didn't work. I'll spend some time at the end of each unit and the end of the semester to look for trends – what am I doing that consistently works (in which case, I need to do it regularly) and what I am doing that consistently doesn't work (in which case I'll need to visit the CTE to get some guidance about what to do differently for better results).

(2) I will participate in the Master Teacher Program. I've spent the last 2 years learning about my subject area, and I'll spend the next 2 years learning about teaching. I will set aside two hours per month to actively read the MTP reading and jot down notes and questions to bring up at MTP discussion groups. I will take advantage of the resources available.

(3) At the end of the semester, I will sit down with my student evaluations and take an objective look at what my students said. I will compare my notes with what did and didn't work with the student's comments of what did and didn't work. I'll meet with an experienced teacher who I trust to get some suggestions about how to continue improving.