

Teaching Philosophy  
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Teaching and learning empower students to tell their own story, converse with the story of a discipline, and organize their own cognitive map for shaping their future story. By going through these dialogic processes students hone their thinking; integrate their beliefs, values, and commitments; and practice moral values. This teaching philosophy emerges from my own experience teaching in the church and the academy. I taught Biblical Hebrew for two semesters at Brite Divinity School and served as a teaching assistant for six semesters in an introductory undergraduate course, Understanding Religion: Texts & Ideas (focusing on the Hebrew Bible), in the religion department at Texas Christian University. Additionally, I have advised and designed programming for graduate and undergraduate students in the Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE) program at Syracuse University over the past four years.

In these various educational contexts I seek to teach students not what to think, but help them shape how they think. I encourage students to approach new information with openness, an inquiring mind, an empathetic heart, and a growing sense of what is important to them. At the introductory level I expect students to be able to read a text or an article and articulate the basics of what they have read, as well as key concepts discussed in class. By the end of the course I expect students to be able to offer a thoughtful analysis of course texts as well as a critical reflection of their own thoughts and ideas about the materials covered. I expect to see a consideration of ideas outside a student's own perspective and a beginning recognition of how his or her perspective shapes the meaning derived from those ideas. I utilize lecture, discussion, class assignments, reflection papers, feedback, and personal meetings with students to accomplish these goals.

Upper level classes take this approach to the next level: including a mixture of lecture and discussion, but at this stage students should be able to assert more than the basics of what they have read and the meanings they derive. Advanced students should synthesize concepts and develop a thoughtful, articulate, and well-supported argument. They should name and explore the "So What?" question. What difference do the concepts of the course make to them? How will they proceed differently or similarly in light of this new information? If they have come to a different conclusion on some issue at the end of the course, why has this change occurred? How will their interactions with readings, research, and discussion impact who they are as people, as professionals, as ethical actors, and as citizens?

Ultimately, my goal is to teach students how to work through vital questions of existence so that they will develop a framework for dealing with the various decisions they will make going forward — whether in the workforce, with their families and friends, in the public square, or within faith and community organizations. The question of what kind of humans we want to be, which is at the core of a liberal arts education, impacts all aspects of life from how we behave ethically in the workplace to how we negotiate chores in the household. I delight in leading and accompanying students as we explore these questions together.