STATEMENT OF TEACHING

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My strategy in the classroom is to broaden the scope of my students’ mathematical abilities, to enhance student confidence and diligence, and to generate curiosity, thereby reducing anxiety and elucidating the abstraction which often surrounds the field of mathematics.

Two principles guide my efforts to expand the mathematical capabilities of my students. First, I present with clarity to ensure student comprehension. Each of my lectures is prepared and professed in vibrant colors; I use frequent compact lists to summarize key points, and implement carefully placed boxes to section off various distinct aspects of my presentations, so that all students leave with a vivid recollection of each new concept. To allow the class to digest the material thoroughly, I pause for ten seconds after each critical statement to ask for questions. To quote a former student: “He always lets you feel comfortable that you can ask him about any sentence he said in class, at any time.”

Second, I anticipate the pitfalls into which my students may fall. As my students turn in more work, I log, categorize and memorize common mistakes sorted by problem type, and use this data to make adjustments to my teaching style for future assignments and courses. Additionally, I check my gradebooks daily; when students experience notable decreases in performance, I message them to ascertain their misunderstandings, allowing me to add to my log while simultaneously boosting motivation. By applying these principles, I immediately enjoyed a 40 percent improvement on average exam performance, and a doubling of the average overall performance of students falling to the range of D or lower within the first two weeks of class.

My second goal is to build confidence, and thus diligence. To this end, it is paramount that I ensure my students feel heard with every concern. I make it known early each semester that students can message me via various social media platforms at any time with any issue and expect a prompt reply, and I make sure to begin calling each student by name within the first two weeks of class. Additionally, I have begun incorporating anonymous evaluations of my performance after each midterm. This allows me to periodically tailor my teaching to the needs of my class on a semester-wise basis.

Fair and fully explained grading also increases student confidence. Every quiz and exam is meticulously solved during the class proceeding its due date, generally by a volunteering student; I carry a small log of each mistake made, so the entire class can learn from each individual’s errors in an anonymous environment. Troublesome homework problems are solved in class by a student at the board before their respective due dates. During these presentations, I love to sit amidst the remainder of the class and humorously ask questions as if I am freshly learning the material. To take heat off of the student presenting, I have the students each try to work the problem individually at their desks; I tell them to look up only if they are stuck, but to listen carefully.

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My final goal is to help students acquire the most important intellectual mindset of all: curiosity. By constantly asking my students “How can I better teach this course to suit your goals and interests?” and by sincerely committing myself to increasing my empathy and compassion for my class, I create an environment where my students are alert, consistently in attendance, interactive and inquisitive, interested, and eager to complete their assignments. My students report to me that they feel a measure of fulfillment as a result of my pedagogy, and thus they are willing to participate out of curiosity, because I teach primarily with the goal of aligning my course material with their motivations.

Furthermore, students report me as humorous, encouraging, sincerely interested in the course material, striving for the success of every individual in my class, and without any aura of condescension both inside and beyond the classroom. The following excerpt is just one of many from my recent student evaluations to display this succinctly. “The instructor is always so helpful, enthusiastic, and encouraging without fail. I feel he personally wants me to succeed.” As an example, when I see students struggling to prepare for a test, I invite them to private office hours at the location of their choice, where I calmly and patiently dig for the roots of their problems. I remind them of each relevant theorem and its workings, give them mnemonics that I personally used to learn and retain each fact, and finish by having them each go to the board and slowly walk me through a related problem as if I am a student, thereby giving them the opportunity to teach someone their greatest weaknesses.

While I have a reputation for being firm, I reward effort. I accommodate for differences in student learning styles by watching class performances not just on an assignment-wise basis, but on a spectrum across the entire semester. For example, I give extensions on certain assignments to students who can escape a period of poor performance, and I have frequent private meetings with students during which I first ask how I can help them learn the material on their terms. The following recent student evaluation summarizes my continuously growing capabilities: “Vasaturo concisely teaches what is relevant, reviews appropriately before exams, communicates effectively via email, and on a daily basis encourages students to ask for help and reminds us that he is available for tutoring at the library. He’s also down to earth, approachable, very laid back which is important. Great professor!”

I enjoy teaching and designing all levels of courses, including interdisciplinary courses such as computer programming and statistics. Introductory courses like College Algebra allow me to practice creating solutions to mathematical anxiety while improving my communication skills. Courses like Trigonometry and Calculus allow me to teach denser material to students with varying mathematical background. Finally, I am fascinated watching advanced undergraduates learn to understand proofs in courses like Linear Algebra. I have experience teaching completely online courses, as well as building in-person classes with online module systems such as ALEKS, WebAssign, Blackboard, and MyMathLab. Additionally, I attended a teaching Proseminar each semester at the University of Toledo for six consecutive semesters seeking to refine every facet of my pedagogical capability, and I continuously attend education seminars and presentations to further enhance the learning experiences of my students.

As a mathematician, my personal research is sustained by the prospect of discovery. A core feature of my teaching style is my desire to guide my students as they bring order to the chaos of mathematics. When they penetrate the abstraction to discover the elegance of mathematical mystery, they gain the most profound intellectual catalyst of all: curiosity.