

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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True success for a teacher is achieved in the moment in which he or she is no longer required: the moment in which students are teaching themselves. This may occur in a well-written research paper, or it may occur in a raucous classroom debate. I believe the craft of teaching is constructing an explicit and organized plan to bring this moment about.

As I walk into a classroom on the first day, my goal is to transform what the students may view as an obligation or requirement into a challenge. This requires energy, enthusiasm, humility, and humor. It is my hope that my own engagement with the material at hand draws others to it; I try to hold lively discussions suffused with movement and tempo. I find that students rise to the provocative as well as to material that relates to their unique experiences. A class that promises to reinvent their understanding of language, of grammar, of sound, and of meaning is no small thing.

When I teach, I consider myself an intermediary. I am present to help bridge the gap between the students' own experiences and the linguistics material at hand. While students occasionally absorb information by watching and listening, I believe they learn primarily by doing. On the best of days, the class embarks on a shared process of discovery, rewarding me by wandering into uncharted territories.

The discipline of linguistics is uniquely suited to student-driven learning. As teachers of linguistics, we are largely concerned with an analytical methodology. Our classrooms are places where curiosity and experimentation are welcomed and debate is encouraged. Many of my students will never take another linguistics class, so my hope is that they emerge with a set of skills to examine and probe the next problem they face.

I believe it is necessary to approach each teaching opportunity with complete respect for my students. Their research choices, their interests, and the diverse experiences they bring to the classroom can only enhance their educations as well as my own. While the material both is immediate and important, the individual is more important still. It is my hope that in this way students also gain respect for one another, and appreciate the inquisitiveness, creativity, and talent of other human beings.

In the past four years I have been pleased to discover that teaching is something you have never finished learning how to do. With each new course and each new lecture I can find a way to be a better teacher than I was the day before. I have had the privilege of observing the amazing faculty at UCSC, and I have had the privilege of learning by doing. I have been a teaching assistant and instructor of record in courses throughout the field, from syntax to phonology, Romance languages to historical linguistics. I have found in teaching further motivation and inspiration to continue my own research, and for that reason I plan to make teaching an integral part of my career. Fortunately, I have been teaching just long enough to experience one of teaching's ultimate rewards: the distinct thrill of finding that my former students have become my colleagues and my intellectual peers.