

Teaching Statement

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Mathematics is a challenging and intimidating subject for most students. As an instructor, I believe that my duty to the students entails two things: calming their preexisting mathematical fears and presenting the material. These two are very correlated. If my students are at ease, they will grasp the material easier.

I do a few things to accomplish these two tasks. First and foremost, I learn their names as soon as possible, usually by the end of the second week. Calling roll and handing back papers help me accomplish this. As a student, I felt a little more at ease in a big class if the teacher knew my name. Thus, I've applied the same philosophy to my students.

Secondly, I conduct my class in an organized, yet informal way. I tend to take the material in the text and reword it into something more meaningful to the students while still retaining the essence and the mathematical accuracy of the material.

I also engage the students during lecture. When I present new material, I take a break and look around the room. Some people might get it, but there will always be some that won't. I then rephrase the material if possible. Then I follow it up with lots of examples with every small step covered. Then the next day, just to hammer in the material, I take the first five minutes of class to do a review problem. I'd allow them to try it on their own at first, then we would go over it together, with me giving slight prompting to the class. I'd ask questions like, "What's the first thing that we should try?" or "What would be a good idea to use next?" This sometimes results in an awkward silence, so sometimes I give more hints, such as "What topic did we learn yesterday?" which usually elicits more responsiveness.

I also try to make myself as available to my students as possible. In addition to office hours, I've found that the students really appreciate a study session the day or night before a test. I started this the second time I taught Pre-Calculus and my grades [and evaluations] showed big improvements.

Most importantly, though, is that I adapt to my class' needs. My ultimate objective is to cover the required material. If need be, however, I will take my time and go slower if it is beneficial for a few individuals. To make up for the difference, I would then look at future lectures and see where I can do less examples in concepts that are not so hard to grasp.

Here are a couple of my evaluations. The rest of them may be viewed on my website at <http://math.uga.edu/~pbergonio>.

"[Phil] did well responding to questions [and the] class and was very patient with students who may have taken longer to understand the material. The instructor took office hours to another level. There was never a moment he was unavailable for homework, quiz, and even test questions."

"He explains everything formally at first, and then breaks it down to the lowest level to make sure everyone understands. He always makes sure that we do plenty of examples to make sure everyone understands the material."

I believe that teaching is my passion and my calling in this life. I find it both enjoyable and fulfilling. I hope to be in this profession for many years to come.