

My Teaching Philosophy for Health Science Students

by

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Learning is exciting; that is why I enjoy teaching others. My teaching philosophy embodies the spirit of *docendo discimus*: “by teaching we learn”. To me, learning and teaching go hand in hand. The more I teach, the more I learn about the students, myself, and the subject matter. Instructors should be lifelong learners; my ethical responsibility is to remain abreast of the latest developments in health science. In my classroom, I value evidence-based practice above all else. The field of health science is ever evolving and directly serves patients, clients, and community members. Therefore, all decisions made regarding their nutritional guidance should include the patient's values or preferences, the best and most current research evidence, and practical experience.

Humans are born neither good nor bad rather, they develop healthy or unhealthy behaviors and perspectives over time. No matter how much we identify with something, we can change our behaviors, beliefs, knowledge, or skills with a growth mindset. In an academic setting, a growth mindset is essential. The field of health science is complex and often challenging. When I teach or interact with students, I always encourage them to embrace challenges, persist despite obstacles, see effort as a path to mastery, learn from criticism and feedback, and be inspired by others. Additionally, pairing grit with a growth mindset is a powerful mentality to succeed in an undergraduate or graduate health science program. In practice, this means continuously speaking on it in classes, coaching students during office hours, modeling a growth mindset, and providing students with campus resources when additional support is required.

Furthermore, health science students require education and practice in critical thinking to be successful health and health science professionals. In practice, this involves curating course content and assessments to help students think critically in a variety of potential settings such as, but not limited to, hospitals, foodservice operations, military bases, business meetings, rehabilitation centers, and community centers. I encourage students to ask reflective questions (e.g., What do I already know?), question fundamental assumptions, engage in metacognition, embrace differing perspectives, evaluate existing evidence, create their own opinions, and ultimately understand that critical thinking is a tool that must be intentionally implemented.

As critical thinkers with a growth mindset, students will have the mental tools to enter their health science internship, workforce, health science registration exam, or terminal degree program as leaders in the profession. Transformative learning must occur for students to engage knowledgeably with people across cultures and understand the complexities of differing identities. Students need a fundamental change in how they see themselves and the world they live in and work. This starts by recognizing that being ethnocentric reinforces the marginalization and oppression of other systems of learning and knowing. As the instructor, I must help students consider how knowledge is produced, whose interests are being served by this information, and how knowledge becomes validated nationally and globally. High-level thinking prepares leaders to tackle the global health crisis and advance the profession.

I am a proponent of implementing the principles of andragogy rather than pedagogy at the collegiate level. In practice, this involves empowering students to become self-directed learners, respecting their lived experiences, recognizing their readiness to learn, encouraging internal motivation, and providing a rationale for course objectives and activities. I must help students transition from teacher-directed to student-directed learning.

Adult learners bring a wealth of experience with them to the classroom. I seek opportunities to encourage students to draw on their experience related to the subject matter and compare and contrast previous perspectives with new knowledge to guide future practice. Additionally, the methodologies of andragogy have proven effective in teaching leadership, continuing professional education, syllabus construction in higher education, health literacy, mentoring, and adult learning on a virtual platform. As an instructor and mentor, I make it my professional responsibility to see students become independent thinkers and growth-oriented.

I value trust, empathy, transparency, effort, humility, passion, and respect for developing a healthy instructor-student relationship. I create trust by cultivating a classroom environment that allows the students to feel accepted, respected, and supported. I empathize with the students because I have been in their place and understand the struggles of achieving high-performance levels in a formal education setting. Moreover, I always seek to be transparent with students; I prefer to be honest with what I know and what I don't know. I always try my best, including in course and syllabus design, classroom instruction, assessment and evaluation methods, student advisement, and other academic activities.

Furthermore, as their instructor, I remain humble. I teach to develop the next generation of health professionals, not to be self-important. Passion is another characteristic essential to my instruction. Another reason I teach about health science is because I love nutrition, and it is my life mission to share that passion with students. Lastly, I value respect in the classroom. I respect my students by the way I communicate with them. I prefer to communicate using a collaborative approach. This entails a tonal shift when lecturing, distributing assignments, providing feedback and constructive criticism, and providing career guidance. The focus is on treating students as future colleagues and collaborators rather than subordinates. This collaborative approach fosters a spirit of mutuality between the students and me as joint inquirers and encourages the students to persist despite obstacles because I anticipate their success.

I have been successful in my career because of attentive and dedicated professors and mentors that invested in me. Those professors and mentors believed I could do great things with enough vision and grit. I believe all adult learners have the same potential in life, they just need the right instructor to facilitate their learning. I want to be that instructor for health science students. I seek to be a learning conduit that helps get students from where they are now to where they want to be.