

Teaching Statement - Eirik Berge

I find the act of teaching one of the more rewarding aspects of my job, and my own understanding of subjects is greatly amplified through teaching. In brief, my teaching philosophy is the following: A lecturer should provide the students with a structured learning environment and motivate students to take an active role in their own learning experience. Let me elaborate on what I think makes a good lecturer:

Preparedness and Knowledge

There are a plethora of pedagogical techniques that can be applied in the classroom setting to make the lecturing more efficient. This can be presentational such as writing neatly on the blackboard, speaking clearly with well thought out pauses, etc. It can also be adapting interactive learning techniques such as discussions, quizzes and the like. Nevertheless, the most important and basic requirement for a good lecture is for the lecturer to be both prepared and having sufficient knowledge to adequately explain the topic. There is no doubt in my mind that the pedagogical techniques described above do enhance a lecture that is already well-prepared. However, prioritizing to incorporate these techniques as a substitute for preparedness and knowledge is to apply frosting to a non-existent cake. Students who attend my lectures have made the active choice to trust in my capacity to teach them about the topic. As such, it would be disingenuous of me to show up not properly prepared while still recommending the students to attend my lectures.

Adaptivity and Openness

During a course, the students will usually (in some way or another) give feedback regarding the lecturing and the course in general. This should be taken seriously for two reasons: Firstly, it is an excellent way to improve the course in ways the lecturer has not thought about. This could be minor things such as adjusting the volume of the speakers, or more major concerns like the pace of the lectures or the number of practical applications presented. The second reason is more on the psychological level, as the feedback process gives the students agency and the feeling that they are heard. If the concerns of the students are taken seriously, this will reflect positively on both the course and the lecturer. The lecturer should also strive to be approachable so that the students feel comfortable addressing problems with the course so they can be resolved early on.

Structure Outside the Classroom

The students should feel like the course has a clear structure, and they should know at any time what is expected of them. Hence the curriculum should be set from the beginning, with only minor changes happening throughout the semester. The number and dates of obligatory exercises (if there are any) should be clear from the start to both the students and the lecturer. What you expect a student should know, what you choose to lecture, and what will be on the exam should be highly correlated. All these things are routine for some lecturers but foreign to others. I have experienced

many a time as a student that the key to a structured learning environment is, not surprisingly, structure.

Inspiration

A lecturer should inspire students, both to perform better and to be inquisitive regarding the subject matter. One of the main ways to go about doing this is to showcase enthusiasm for the subject while teaching it. This comes very naturally for some but is to others as difficult as laughing genuinely on command. I believe practice makes this better; once teaching becomes less nerve-racking one can start to work on projecting passion for the subject at hand. This is less tangible than practicing writing neatly on the blackboard, although equally important. Inspiration can also be dealt out on a more person to person basis: Every time a student comes asking a question, be it concrete or abstract, it can be an opportunity to start a discussion and motivate the student to seek out interesting variations of their question.

Refinement

A lecturer should always strive to be better. It is common to fall into the trap of thinking that one will simply excel at teaching by doing it over and over again. A lecturer will certainly gain experience after teaching for a long time; one rarely sees seasoned lecturers committing the basic mistakes that a complete novice wanders through. However, I believe there is a difference between actively evaluating both the good and the bad of one's teaching, compared to simply "going through the motions". As with any other craft, the lecturer should work on addressing the weaker parts of their teaching repertoire. I think it is useful to ponder on what made your favorite lecturer so good, and what made your least favorite lecturer less so. Usually, it boils down to things that can be adapted by anyone willing to invest the time.