

## Teaching Mission and Goals

“Come to the edge,” he said. They said “We are afraid.” “Come to the edge,” he said. They came. He pushed them and they flew.

— Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918)

This verse captures my view of the teacher’s mission. While one of my goals as a teacher is to develop students’ interest in the subject by providing them with knowledge of how flying occurs and what they need to be able to fly, taking them to the edge of what is possible and pushing them to fly are the goals that are much more difficult to achieve. My major long-term goal, then, is to become a qualified flying instructor who will know the intricacies of flying and techniques for conquering the fear. Recognizing variety of learning styles, understanding how learning occurs, and creating a classroom environment from which students cannot escape without learning are all critical components of facilitating the learning process.

As all of us know, learning, or the acquisition of knowledge or skill, can occur at different levels. While the operational level, or know-how, is important for learning to complete certain tasks, I believe that effective learning should be active and requires the student’s own mental involvement and doing. Engaging students in organizational activities through a variety of applied assignments or allowing them to come up with their own assignments should enhance their motivation to learn and prepare them to deal with real life situations.

A number of objectives need to be achieved in order to facilitate active learning. First, I seek to create a classroom culture that fosters creativity, experimentation, critical thinking, teamwork, information sharing, flexibility, participation, and enthusiasm. My relationship with students is built on values of respect, fairness, openness to their input and criticisms, and recognition that there are many things I can learn from them. Second, I seek to provide students all the necessary resources needed to achieve the learning goals. I try to be available as much as possible for individual consultations and addressing any questions they might have during the week. Finally, I incorporate a variety of different types of assignments to address the variety of motivational styles.

A couple of examples are in order to illustrate these points. The idea to organize a workshop “Innovation: Taking Your Organization in New Directions” was born during a class brainstorming session on how the students could apply the knowledge they gained during the

course on Managing Innovation and Organizational Change (while I did have a couple of assignments listed, I wanted them to come up with their own). Since all of the students wanted to give something back to the community, the decision was made to organize a workshop and to invite community leaders, nonprofit managers, students, and faculty. During this workshop each of the students made mini-presentations on a range of topics dealing with innovation, and they introduced participants to a number of experiential exercises.

Yet another example is an assignment for the course, Evaluating Community Initiatives and Institutional Practices. For this assignment, students were asked to develop a website related to a program evaluation topic in their area of interest. As most of the students had never designed a website, they were worried and a little hesitant at first. As the semester progressed, they realized that they were never asked to do things without being provided with all the necessary tools first. The comments “I can not do it,” “This is way too much” frequently heard at the beginning of the semester turned into “I cannot believe I did it!!” at the end. One of the students commented: “Thank you, Kristina, for making this assignment. It was not easy. It challenged, and frustrated, and drove me quite mad... But in the end, it was one of the most important assignments I’ve ever had.”

Finally, my last long-term teaching goal has to do with my own professional development. In order to accomplish these goals, I should keep “flying” myself. I should seek to learn about new teaching methodologies, ways to foster active learning, and ways to motivate students.