

Meri Rose Ekberg

Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher I strive to equip students with tools they can use to accomplish their own learning. I believe the role of a teacher is to encourage critical thinking and life long learning, rather than present information that is passively absorbed. In order to do this I aim to create learning environments that are active, varied, and engaging. I often emphasize the “why” of skills and activities, with the goal of communicating to students how something is useful for their current project or their future development as researchers. I endeavor to provide ample opportunity for questioning, both during class and in assignments. I create an open and comfortable environment by being relaxed and confident in my presentation, and by incorporating humor and trending topics that incite participation and engagement.

I believe strongly in the use of peer-to-peer activities early in the learning experience in order to establish a sharing and social environment. Getting to know classmates helps students settle into a new physical and mental setting. It is important to me that initial peer activities be informal and low-risk. Asking students to briefly exchange topic ideas or discuss a course-related question is a simple way to encourage them to verbalize their ideas. I believe these activities help students build confidence, while also demanding a defined level of participation and engagement. After students have established a rapport with one another, moving on to lengthier projects is a great way to incite self-directed learning. As an example, when I taught a library information session to a group of undergraduate students I implemented a partner activity that required completing a worksheet together. The students expressed a possible paper topic to one another, and then answered a series of increasingly difficult questions about the related content they located within article databases. I found the students were more interested in the activity and were able to complete more of the worksheet than when they worked alone.

I value variety in class sessions, and believe that in order to engage a diverse population of learners the activities need to be equally varied. I follow the guiding principles of universal design in order to present information in multiple modalities. As a student, it was easy for me to lose interest in a course if the professor spent the entire class session lecturing. As a teacher, I aim to keep my students engaged in order to exploit their learning potential. Not only do I strive to use different teaching tools in the classroom, but I also believe it is important to be as flexible as time permits and provide alternative assignments or activities if possible. When using the same lesson plan, I vary the strategies I use to engage students depending on how their particular class reacts to my teaching. I also try to have backup activities prepared for those students who may not be suited to a certain activity. For instance, I could provide a worksheet to a student who needs motivation during independent research, or allow a student to work independently who may struggle with group work.

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When I do lecture at length, I ask questions as often as possible in order to keep my students' attention and provide a gateway for them to actively participate in the subject. I try to encourage answers from reluctant students by asking open-ended questions that encourage students to provide their own opinion, and rephrasing as needed to provide ample time for a response. I believe that students are empowered by verbalizing their ideas in front of a class, so I endeavor to create conversation as often as possible. Asking questions changes the pace of the lecture and provides students with a moment for reflection. I am currently working on becoming more concise when I lecture, and establishing learning outcomes that balance course content with my interest in using a variety of strategies in the classroom. I want students in my class to be interested in what I present, and be comfortable expressing their ideas in front of their peers. I also want students to feel that they can come to me if an activity or assignment is not right for them, so that I can provide a different tool they can use to engage with and learn the material. I hope that students leave my class with an understanding of how they can shape their own learning in order to become more critical and thoughtful people.