

Teaching Statement

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Introduction

My overarching goal when teaching is to prepare students for their future careers. To that end, I distill the information that students need to know, facilitate an engaging learning experience, and include opportunities for students to grow professionally and personally. I have a variety of teaching experience, from introductory labs in the biological sciences to a research-based course focused on predator-prey interactions. I look forward to the opportunity and challenge of designing my own courses at XX University.

I primarily see my teaching role as a facilitator of learning. Yes, I lecture and provide information, but I think the bulk of learning occurs when students think critically and apply what they are learning. I view teaching as a skill that I can improve, which is why I have taken courses in science education and why I highly value feedback from students and peers. I am also intentional about creating an environment that is comfortable, yet challenging.

Teaching Strategies

I think quality teaching requires thoughtful preparation before class and intentionality during class. As a student, I appreciated when a course was well designed, including an intuitive structure and attention to detail. While teaching the predator-prey interactions course at Clemson University, I spent time before the semester planning the general topic of each meeting, as well as backwards planning the steps needed to complete the research project by the end of the semester. In addition, prior to each class I spent time outlining the agenda and setting a target duration for each activity. During class, I try to create an experience that students look forward to. I strive to make my students feel welcome in class and ultimately create a sense of community. I make sure to greet students by name when they enter the classroom, and when group size allows, check in with how their semester is going. I also build rapport with students by being open and authentic with them about my experiences, as well as how I am feeling that day. Some of the best teachers I have would share when they are having an off day, which humanizes them, and also suggests empathy for when students inevitably have bad days as well. I also set clear expectations on how to have inclusive discussions, including how to approach an opinion someone disagrees with, and self-awareness of the time spent speaking. I like getting students to talk to each other in class and I make sure to have one group project per course so they can build their collaborative skills.

I use a variety of strategies while teaching to facilitate student learning. I make the lecture portions of class engaging by telling stories (but not too many), including photos and videos, and adding in quick ways for students to participate (e.g., Mentimeter). When I give guest lectures, I bring GPS collars and wildlife cameras with me so students can handle the technology we use to study wildlife. I also embrace the use of educational tools, such as Flipgrid and Perusal, which help make assignments more collaborative and enjoyable. Although I am an ecologist by training, during graduate school I developed an interest in psychology and behavioral economics, and would not only think about what these disciplines had to teach me about myself, but also think about what I could apply to my professional life. For example, I reduce cognitive load in my students while teaching, by slowly revealing information on a slide rather than putting it all up at

once. More generally, I try to reduce any friction that students might experience to their learning, e.g., barriers to coming to office hours or completing assignments on time. Lastly, I try to get students to feel a sense of ownership over assignments (projects in particular) because they are more likely to care about something they feel they have designed and executed.

Assessment and Feedback

I view assessments as a form of feedback for the students and myself. I think assessments need clear expectations, of both the skills or knowledge that will be assessed and how each one relates to student learning outcomes. I think frequent, lower stakes assessments are particularly effective as a gauge of student learning and teaching effectiveness. The most challenging class I have ever taken (graduate level microbiology) had 10-15 minute quizzes every other week, which was a great way for me to know which parts of the material I had not yet mastered. These types of assessments also help me recognize patterns in student learning that may be due to ineffective teaching.

In general, I highly value feedback; I work hard to give my students good feedback while also taking feedback from them seriously. On writing assignments, I make sure to include praise mixed in with specific comments that will help their writing improve. I also include opportunities for students to give each other feedback, which reduces my workload while also creating a collaborative experience. In addition, when I receive student feedback, I make sure to incorporate it into my teaching. When I taught biology labs, early on some of my student evaluations would say that I need to slow down when lecturing, and so I slowed my pace in future quarters. I also ask for feedback when I give guest lectures, particularly when it is my first or second time teaching about a certain topic. I adjust as needed, but it is also encouraging to hear positive feedback from students as well. One student at a high school near my field site said: *“I appreciated the fact that you were engaged with us when we asked questions, it made me feel as if my question and I were valid and important.”* In addition, I also update my teaching to reflect current ecological theory and practice. For example, I think presenting science as a narrative, especially when there is debate (e.g., effects from wolves in Yellowstone), is an engaging way to teach.

Potential Courses

I can teach courses in wildlife ecology and conservation. At the undergraduate level, courses I can teach include Wildlife Techniques, Wildlife Management, and some sort of Study Design and Analysis course for advanced students. I would also consider developing a field course because I think they are valuable experiences for undergraduates based on talking with students who took the one I assisted with at Cal Poly and the one taught by my advisor at Clemson University. At the graduate level, I could develop courses on more specialized topics, including Resource Selection, Human-Wildlife Interactions, and Social and Environmental Justice. [insert sentences about institution/department specific needs]