

Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher and mentor of tomorrow's public relations professionals, I consider it my responsibility to prepare students to communicate with integrity and to approach complex issues through critical thinking and perspective taking. Over the past 12 years, my teaching philosophy has evolved, as I reflect on lessons learned in the classroom and as I take into consideration how the communication landscape has changed.

Critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills are essential for student success. In an environment of disinformation, today's public relations students need to be prepared to think critically about the communication they create and disseminate. I find that students have a strong sense of purpose and want to contribute to society, and when encouraged, see the connection between their own personal decision-making and the impact their work will have on society. I encourage students to explore their values through personal reflection, and then explore how values would influence their work style and their communication decisions. In the law and ethics course that I teach, students write a personal code of ethics and reflect on how to put their personal values into action. During the semester, students learn perspective taking through debates, and the class works together to develop an ethical decision-making model that is used in the second half of the semester to analyze case studies of corporate communication.

Online students need flexibility, empowerment, and connection. Over the past three years my undergraduate teaching has focused on my department's World Campus major. Many students in the program are veterans or busy parents who balance a full-time job, family responsibilities, and pursuit of a degree. Creating and delivering an online course presents many unique challenges, particularly when teaching complex material such as the research methods course. As online technology evolves, I am always searching for new ways to engage students and deliver useful content. Online students need the flexibility of asynchronous learning, empowerment to lead their own learning, and connections with other students and the instructor. I address these challenges in several ways. Material in my online courses is presented in multiple formats, including video, audio, and written material that allow students to access chunks of information throughout the week as their schedules allow. I encourage independent problem-solving by presenting the class with a challenge that can only be solved through collaboration and critical thinking. For example, in the research course, students select the topic of a class-wide research project, develop research questions together, create a survey, collect data, and analyze it to answer their original questions. Students appreciate connecting and working with other students, but it works best when assignments are clear and purposeful. For example, I have implemented an online debate that is chunked into sections, allowing student teams to work together in clearly defined steps. They learn from one another and offer peer reviews of other classmates' work. I believe it is important for instructors to be present in the class and provide consistent feedback and guidance. Students learn best in an online environment if they hear from the instructor about what they are doing well and what needs to improve.

Communication beyond the classroom encourages curiosity and learning. An important aspect of my teaching strategy is providing mentorship to students. This includes individual meetings with online and residence students to review their portfolios, discuss career options, and review internship opportunities. Research has shown that when students engage with an instructor outside of the classroom, they become more engaged in the classroom, both with the material and the instructor. Student meetings often lead to interesting topics of discussion, and I find that I learn as much as they do from the conversations. In my Comm 473 Public Relations Campaign, I work with student teams to develop, implement, and assess campaigns with community partners. This engagement with teammates, the community partners, and me outside of the classroom models their future career work, and helps develop work-related behaviors that will benefit them as they transition into the profession.