

## Teaching Philosophy of Nathan Greenauer

As a teacher, it is important for me to remain flexible in order to best educate students that differ from year to year, semester to semester, and class to class. Students differ in their interests and aptitudes. They differ in their experiences and worldviews. They differ in their expectations and ambitions. I must be sensitive to these individual variations and demonstrate flexibility in my methods to be successful. Additionally, because no two students or semesters are alike, I must also be confident in my ability in the face of uncertainty and, sometimes, ambiguity.

A central goal of my approach to teaching is to help my students develop these same competences. The obstacles they will encounter beyond the classroom will be ill-defined and require a creative application of previously learned skills. I therefore strive to teach my students to be flexible and willing to adapt to novel situations. To do so, I present them with authentic experiences that encourage them to explore alternative interpretations, adopt unique perspectives, and generate novel solutions. One example of an authentic experience that I draw upon, in and out of the classroom, is research.

I value my role as a facilitator of student involvement in research. Each semester, I encourage and mentor students to pursue research interests that extend beyond their coursework. I invite them to assist me in my research in order to afford them experiences with every stage of scientific inquiry. However, the ultimate goal is to inspire them to develop their own research projects under my mentorship. Involvement in independent research allows students to develop and pursue their own scholarly interests, ascertain whether research and graduate training are appropriate for them, and broaden their knowledge and perspective on scientific inquiry. Regardless of their future career goals, such experiences foster the development of critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving skills that will apply to many aspects of their lives.

I have found that student researchers become highly invested in their projects due to a sense of ownership. In my classes, I have similarly tried to increase student engagement by giving them a voice in their education. For instance, I involve students in decisions that affect them, such as selecting exam formats or determining the medium for projects and presentations. I also afford them the freedom to select topics for projects, or even which of several topics will be covered in the course. Giving students a degree of control over their education promotes a sense of ownership, responsibility, and accountability for their own experiences. In turn, students become more invested and intrinsically motivated, rather than driven by external demands and incentives.

The sense of personal responsibility instilled by this participatory decision-making process can at first be overwhelming to students, particularly those unaccustomed to circumstances for which no correct answer exists. To alleviate these feelings, I strive to develop a sense of community among my students that continues outside of the classroom. To this end, I frequently rely on social media and mobile applications that support interactions between students and with me, without time, topic, or format restrictions. For instance, in all of my courses I use *GroupMe*, a group messaging application that students typically use to ask for help or clarification, to share information, or simply to socialize. Such applications grant students nearly immediate access to me, at all times, throughout the semester. However, because these interactions are generally public, all students in the class can benefit from what would otherwise be a private conversation. The sense of community that emerges from these interactions often prompt students to help and encourage each other—in effect, to act as their own social support network. Such opportunities to interact outside of the classroom have been successful both at attenuating stress and increasing collaboration. Additionally, it often serves as a reminder that the applications of course content outlasts the short time spent in class each week.

From year to year, and from semester to semester, my students are constantly changing. To be effective at teaching, I must also change. My techniques must evolve; my approach must adapt. By the time you read this, it will reflect who I was, rather than who I am now, as a teacher. If I am successful, my students will be prepared for their own uncertain and, sometimes, ambiguous future.