

My teaching philosophy can be captured by three basic convictions.

The first of these is that **learning is a fundamentally active, bi-directional process—a never-ending conversation sparked by mutual curiosity (or, at times, consternation) and fed by the evolution of shared understanding.** This means that before anything else can happen, I have to help you (my student) see that you are surrounded by and immersed in on-going, sometimes centuries-old, conversations and your primary challenge as a college student (no matter your major) is to become a part of them.

To do this successfully, you must ultimately do two things: 1) *find your own voice*, and 2) *make yourself heard*. In the past, when I've talked with students about what this means, we usually end up with something like the following:

- **Finding your own voice** is not simply about being comfortable with asking questions or sharing opinions in class, or disagreeing (even publicly) with your fellow classmates or teachers. It's even about more than being honest with yourself that you'd much rather study art than chemistry, despite what your parents think. It's about figuring out what you believe and why, coming to grips with what you don't know (despite thinking that you did) and with the falsehoods you must let go of in order to grow into a thriving, compassionate human being. *And this requires learning to think critically about who you are and what kind of person you want to be—which requires cultivating a deep understanding of the physical/biological, social/cultural, and political/economic world in which we now live (as well as an appreciation for its past and a concern for its future).*
- **Making yourself heard** is not about who can “yell the loudest”—who has the most social influence, the fanciest yacht, or the biggest fan base. It's about learning to listening to the quietest voices (inside and out). It's about taking a stand—caring enough to sacrifice comfort/safety, if necessary, to do what needs to be done, to protect those who need protecting, and to make the world a sane, humane place to live. It's about taking risks, making tough choices, and living with a *whole heart*. Understanding your insignificance (that you are only one in a sea of billions, alive and dead) and yet, being willing to live with boldness and integrity the life that is uniquely yours. *And this requires cultivating empathy and imagination—the creative genius needed to see things not just as they are, but as they could be—and developing the many skills needed to be an effective, courageous, and compassionate agent of change.*

I'm convinced that laying this foundation (both in and outside the classroom) has the power to transform your college experience. You will start to see how each course you take, each activity in which you participate, serves as a node holding together a larger web—of ideas, opportunities, experiences, relationships, and shared meaning—that stands at the center of the adult you are becoming and will one day be. Nothing, from this perspective, is irrelevant. It all matters *somewhat* to where you are, where you've been, and where you're going.

Of course, laying this foundation is only the beginning—after which the hard work begins. And by that, I mean the hard work of *making myself obsolete*. While teaching can never happen without learning, learning happens *all the time* without teaching. And so, I take my educational role to be nothing more (or less) than providing a set of training wheels. This brings me to my second conviction, which is that as a teacher, **I am only as successful as I am not necessary** for you to actively engage and master course materials, to demonstrate your ability to critically articulate, discuss, and evaluate those materials, incorporate them into a larger framework of knowledge, and recognize their relevance to your life and the lives of those around you. Ultimately, your education is up to you!

My third (and perhaps most important) conviction is that what I do as a professor **is a form of celebration**. How often are we given the opportunity to stop and reflect, to wonder, question, and investigate the things that matter to us most as human beings—and to share that with others? For me, the classroom (and my research lab) provides that opportunity. I teach because it feeds my intellectual curiosity—and because it helps me spark that curiosity in others. It is a way for me to help you discover and share your interests with others, to figure out what you care about and why it matters. In short, *I love my job!*