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Center for Excellence  
in Teaching



## REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIO

### 1. Define your teaching philosophy.

As a professor of communications, my goal is to be a “servant” teacher. I am modeling this approach to the management philosophy promoted by Robert Greenleaf who coined the phrase, “Servant Leader.” According to Greenleaf, “A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong.” This was my philosophy when I ran the communications department at a trade association and infuses everything that I do as teacher on the university level.

In my business career, I led a talented group of professionals. While they reported to me, I felt my job was to serve them. This led to a very dedicated and creative team that consistently exceeded expectations. Because I held an executive-level position in the field where I teach, I am keenly aware of the skills necessary to succeed in today’s rapidly changing business and media environment.

The study of communications is a combination of academic understanding of theory, research and analysis combined with mastering skills such as writing, speaking and a working knowledge of the media. In my opinion it is an academic discipline as well as “trade school” where specific skills need to be mastered to get and keep a job. It is my goal as a professor to make sure that both aspects of the field are covered.

When creating the syllabus for my classes, I also make sure that the topics and focus of the semester covers everything that is part of the published description. I believe this is important as students are sacrificing time and money when they enroll in a program. I believe that it is my obligation to teach what they are expecting to learn. I believe this is a sacred contract. However, after I am confident, that the syllabus has covered

everything promised, I reality check it with the profession as it is today. So, I frequently supplement the required syllabus with guest speakers, current case studies and real-time examples in traditional and social media.

Lastly, my philosophy of teaching is to support and inspire each of my students by making myself available for extra help and by working to instill confidence in their individual ability to master the subject matter.

**2. Have you ever observed a master teacher? If the answer is yes, what do you recall most from the experience?**

Yes. My high school physics teacher was a master teacher. I went to a Catholic, private all girls high school. The teacher was a nun. To my teenage self, she seemed old. But was likely much younger than I thought. I can still see her, remember everything that I learned but am sorry to say that I don't remember her name.

She had taught physics at the school for many years and was known as the teacher who never had a student fail either the New York State Regent's exam or the College Advanced Placement exam. She was spry and little and started the first class by standing on her desk, jumping off and exclaiming "this is physics." She also made us all scream, "physics is fun.!" She also said that the school required us to take those two exams. She also said they were easy in a very dismissive manner. She was not impressed the tests. But, she did not want us to simply pass, these "simple, easy, tests," she wanted us to crush them. I never liked math or science, so not only did I not believe her, I thought she was nuts.

But what started to win me over, was her unshakeable belief in the ability of everyone in our class. She constantly told us we were smart. She said the everyone in the class had the ability to do not only learn physics but advanced physics. But it was not just her words. She had a plan. She also said that if we listened in class and did our homework, we would all do well in class. She also said that physics was a discipline where you needed to master one thing before moving on to the next subject. So, she said that if we did not understand something, we should let her know immediately. She encouraged us to speak up. And she also warned that anyone who snickered if someone asked questions, would lose points from their final grades. She insisted on civility and respect in her classroom. She then said if we did our part and we still did not do well, then she failed us. It was her failure – not ours.

In retrospect, she did so many things right. After a homework assignment, she would sit privately with each student. We would be given an in-class assignment and she would talk to every student in the class individually.

She was able to identify if a student did not understand something and she would work directly with that person – privately. She never made anyone feel bad. And, if a student could do more advanced work, she would also provide individualized attention and privately more advanced work.

She broke advanced physics into little bits. She gave frequent quizzes. And repeated the quizzes. This gave us ample opportunity to not only learn what we did not understand. But, to master the material. We did some works so many times, it became easy. She also encouraged us to call her in the evening if we repeatedly got something wrong. If you called her, she first said something nice. And, always applauded us for asking for help. She took her end of the bargain seriously.

But she did not just say physics is fun. She made it fun. She would talk about the role of physics in playing tennis, cooking and even art. She showed real world implications of physics. She also would roll balls, drop things and even bring in toys to demonstrate something in physics.

We learned the subject matter without realizing that we learned it. She also knew that the best way to learn something is to teach it and she provided many opportunities for each of us to teach parts of the class.

A typical physics class was a combination of demonstrations, silliness, lectures, practice work and even rest. She encouraged us to close our eyes and rest when the work got hard. But, most of all I always felt that she had my back. She never let anyone fall behind.

When it came to time to taking the two exams, she was right. They were easy. She had taught much more advanced physics than the state or national educational system required. My entire class passed both tests and many of us placed in the top percentile on the advanced placement exam. I placed high enough that I did not have to take the required basic science class as a freshman. And, actually enrolled in an advanced physics class as an English major.

For me, this was a very big deal. I always struggled with math. And everyone just assumed that I “could not do math.” Since math was a disaster for me, I assumed that I “could not do” science either. I realized neither was true. I can do science and math.

In terms of math, I figured out that I simply did not learn the basic building blocks. Since I was required to take two math classes in college, I looked them up. And asked my parents if they would pay for me to take one of them ahead of time at the local community college. I wanted to take it pass/fail to take the pressure off. They were happy to pay for me to pre-take the class. I must admit, I was lost on the first day. So, I talked to the professor. He suggested a tutor. I worked hard to pass. Very hard! But I was much more confident when I had to take math in college for a grade.

Taking advanced physics and doing well on the exams gave me confidence in my ability to learn. To not give up, when trying to learn something new. This has been important as I master new technology.

In many ways, I model my classes on her. I set the goals for the class. I make them BIG goals. I also make it clear what the students need to do to succeed. And I break the work into small digestible chunks. I also make myself available to the class. And, most importantly, I hope they not only learn the subject matter but walk away with the confidence in their ability to learn. With every changing work environment, those who have the confidence that they can continually learn have a huge competitive environment.

**3. Give an example of your most successful lesson. Why do you feel it was successful?**

One of the classes that I teach at FIT is corporate communications. A key lesson in that class is the difference between private and publicly traded companies. From a public relations writing perspective, this is a very important distinction as there are very specific legal requirements when communicating for a publicly traded company while there are none for a privately owned company.

Since many of the students in the class are interested in fashion, I had them look up companies to see how which are privately owned and which are publicly traded. They were surprised to learn that Chanel is still privately owned. Most of the other large fashion houses are publicly owned and many are owned by the same big corporate conglomerate. This was a big surprise to them too.

We then discussed how this influenced the communications strategy of the company. They were really engaged. They were also very interested in the fact that there are highly paid jobs doing corporate communications and investor relations for publicly traded companies. For the students who are comfortable with numbers and interested

in the business side of the fashion industry, these jobs were very appealing. These jobs are plentiful and entry level jobs are high paying. Many students paid attention for the rest of the class with the goal of securing one of these entry-level jobs.

But I wanted them to really understand what a publicly traded company is and how understanding this affects their lives. Most did not understand anything about the stock market and thought investing and “Wall Street” was just for rich people. They did not understand that many companies compensate their employees with stocks or that many public pension funds invested in stocks. They also did not know that they could purchase stocks.

I showed a video featuring Warren Buffet who said he purchased his first stock when he was in high school and that he would save money to invest. He also discussed that he considers investing in companies that he personally likes. For instance, he drinks Coke versus Pepsi, so he looked at the financial of the company. Buffet also talked about investing in companies that shared his values. He also mentioned that publicly traded companies hated bad publicity so if the public complained about a company’s track record on diversity, client change or other issue, they may be motivated to change their policies.

The students were very surprised about everything they learned. It was a revelation to them how the stock market affects much more than just rich people and also the power that they have as consumers and investors. It made everything they learned in class very personal.

Most students actually thanked me in their student evaluations for what they learned that semester. Nothing makes a teacher happier than that.

**4. Do you have an example of an unsuccessful lesson? How did you address the challenges?**

One of my most unsuccessful lessons, was actually a class I prepared as a demonstration of my teaching skills for a possible full-time job.

I was given a chapter of a book on a topic that I knew very little about – market research. My area of expertise is communications. I asked for the name of the textbook so that I could get a better sense of the bigger picture. But I was told that the other applicants did not get that information so I would not get it either. At that point, I

should have said that this is not my area of expertise, but I thought that I could teach myself the information. I wanted to prove to the search committee that I could teach a variety of topics as this was something that they stressed was important. This turned out to be a big mistake.

I did my best to learn the material and created a very elaborate PowerPoint presentation. The problem was the PowerPoint was too elaborate. I used every bell and whistle the technology offered. The PowerPoint turned out beautiful but distracting. This was a clear example of not selectively using technology. And, since the subject matter was not in my comfort zone, I was too reliant on the presentation.

In retrospect, if I decided to not ask for another topic, I should have tried to make the subject matter my own. I should have focused on what I understood and show how it applied either academically or in the real world. I also did not engage the students by asking powerful questions to evoke conversation. Instead, I did a very elaborate job of outlining everything that was in the chapter and repeatedly asking if anyone had a question. No one did. I did not get the job. This was an example of not properly utilizing technology. And not being an effective teacher.

##### **5. Why are you introducing and/or expanding the use of technology into your teaching?**

Due to the Covid 19 crisis, all my classes are online so it has become a necessity to embrace technology.

Last semester, when my classes were all turned into online classes, like everyone else, I had to quickly turn my inperson class into an online one. Since I set my classes up like they are online, it was not a difficult transition. I had issues with weird things...like my video being upside down. It took me longer than I would like to admit figuring that out. And, in the end, all I had to do was change my web browser.

Now, I would like to learn the technology available to make my online class the best learning experience for my students as possible. I know that many of them are not happy about going to school online, so it is going to be important to create an engaging learning environment for them.

Prior to the start of the semester, I plan to decide what technology would make my class the most engaging. I would like to include more video and podcasts. I also would like to break the class into groups so that they can have discussions on their own. I want to

use technology to help my students feel like they are truly participating in the discussion and not just passively listening to a presentation.

**6. How do you feel these technology innovations will affect the student experience? How do you think it will affect your experience?**

My goal is to really engage the students. I don't want the online class to be passive. I want them to be able to have group discussion and jump in with questions.

I also understand that some students may have better internet access than others. So, I plan to record presentations and provide links for videos so that they can review material before or after class. That way, they can access the information at a time and place that is convenient for them.

Keeping their attention for a 3-hour online class is not going to be easy and I am personally a bit concerned about this.

As I review the agenda for this semester, I am going to see how I can use technology to keep the pace of the class moving and interesting. I plan to do this by using a combination of traditional lectures with PowerPoints, posting powerful questions to encourage group discussion, showing videos and breaking into groups for discussion and collaborate work.

**7. Please describe new teaching ideas you plan to implement as a result of this technology certificate program.**

I plan to use the content on LinkedIn Learning. There is a wealth of information available that can be used to supplement the textbook. I would like to use these articles as both required reading as well as to provide additional information for students who may have very specific academic interests. For instance, if a student is really interested in sports marketing and PR, I may suggest articles on the topic to help with their projects.

I also would really like to master Padlet so that I can incorporate it into my class. I think that it would be a really good tool to help with collaboration.

I would also like to master all of the tools in collaborate. For instance, I would like to be able to show video in class and also be able to break out into rooms.

Lastly, this semester I would to be able to administer tests in class. But, most importantly, I want to become more comfortable with the technology.

**8. How will these new technology tools/approaches contribute to your classroom practice?**

My goal is to use both new technology and approaches to make this semester a great experience for the students.

I know many of them are very disappointed that they will not be having the typical college experience. Most students are upset that they will not be able to socialize in person. They will not have the same opportunities to meet in the hallway or in the cafeteria.

Many parents are also not happy with online education. They don't feel like they are getting their money's worth. They feel that is it not as good as in-person. My goal is to break that myth and create a fabulous learning experience.

One of the key points made in the "Teaching with Technology" seminar is that "Students need to feel connected to their online course community by interacting with each other as well as the professor." My overall goal is to do that. And I plan to use some of the suggested tactics in the "Technology" course to do this. This includes incorporating social media such as LinkedIn and Instagram, as well as collaborative tools like Padlet, Blackboard Groups, Group Journals. I also plan to use interactive tools

**9. How will you evaluate the success of your activities?**

To me, the ultimate evaluation is going to be from the student evaluations at the end of the class, as well as peer evaluations which I assume will be online.

But I also plan to use Survey Monkey to poll the class to make sure that they are getting value. I hope to do this once or twice during the semester.

But I will also gauge my success by class engagement and participation. If the same few students keep asking questions or giving opinions, I will feel this class has not been successful.

Lastly, I plan to hold online office hours and encourage the class to provide feedback.

## **10. What do you consider to be the bigger picture items with regards to technology and learning?**

For me, personally, I need to become more comfortable with technology in general. I struggle with it in all aspects of my life and not just the classroom. I feel there is an unending learning curve and constantly feel that I am one step behind. More than once, I have wanted to simply give up. But, I have decided to embrace technology and want to master it. And, not feel that it is a constant source of aggravation. I have a ton of great ideas on how to use technology. But, now I actually need to learn how to use the technology.

In terms of technology and learning in general, I think that it is going to revolutionize both how teachers teach. And, how students, of all types and levels are going to learn. Due to the pandemic, technology is obviously necessary to keep schools open. But, after we are able to have class in person, many of the technologies used online are now going to be brought into the classroom. It is going to be expected – especially from younger students who have used technology their entire lives. The days of simply delivering a lecture and then a paper or test as an assessment is rapidly looking very quaint, old-fashioned and dated. The expectation now is a very multi-media experience. The best teachers will also provide ample online work and experiences to supplement the in-classroom experience. In my opinion, all class will eventually become hybrid classes in one way or another. The only difference between hybrid and in-person classes will be the amount of time dedicated to either experience. So, a hybrid class might meet once or twice a month in person with the remaining time being comprised of an online experience. And, an in-person class would meet every week with online work to supplement the in-class experience. I think this is very exciting as eventually students will be able to create a learning experience that best suits their schedules, family responsibilities, work obligations and learning styles. Students may even decide to live much farther from school to save money and have more personal space if they are required to physically be on campus less time. This potentially has the power to revolutionize higher education.

However, there is also a dark side to technology. It could potentially widen the gap between the haves and the have nots. Right, now, it is painfully apparent that FIT students do not all have the same access to technology. Some students are living in houses with their own bedrooms, desks, laptops and printers. The home also has plenty of internet access. Other students are sharing computers with other siblings and even

parents and the amount of internet access is limited. At the extreme, some FIT has students who do not have a permanent home. They may be embarrassed to turn on their cameras or do not have a quiet place to log in for class. This potentially can create an unfair situation for smart, hard-working students who had disadvantaged backgrounds. When everyone met on campus, the playing field was more equal as the school provided plenty of on campus resources. Students could also physically share books and laptops. Currently, those shared resources are not available.

Comfort with technology may also potentially prevent a large number of people from continuing their education. With an increasing number of jobs online that need additional schooling and training, if someone is not comfortable with technology this could be a huge economic disadvantage. Also, older people may or may not be comfortable with technology and this could present both older people who want to go back to school from continuing their education. But, it also could result in experienced, older professors retiring because they are intimidated by the new demands of the classroom. They may retire and take their knowledge and experience with them.