

**Kristina Rand**

## **Teaching Philosophy**

The most important things I took away from my undergraduate and graduate education were the ability to think critically and to confidently solve problems on my own. My main goal in the classroom is to provide students with the same skill sets. Engaging in active, thought-provoking discussions and activities, help develop tools that will endure throughout students' careers. Towards this goal, as an instructor I emphasize the major themes present in to-be-learned information, and encourage students to continually assess how new information fits into the themes. As the acquisition of the specific course content is also a vital component, I strive to present students with information in a way that reflects my own enthusiasm for the knowledge and keeps the classroom atmosphere light and collaborative. Additionally, my experience has taught me that the more relevant to the students' lives the content can be, the better they are at seeing how that information corresponds to the key themes for the course. This can be an exciting challenge, as all students enter the classroom with unique backgrounds and goals for their course and education.

It would be fair to say that a lot of what I have learned about being an effective instructor I learned the hard way. When I received my first teaching assignment, I approached this situation with a little nervousness, and even more (over)confidence. I remember thinking to myself, 'how hard can it be?' People had told me I was articulate and well spoken, I had previous semesters' materials, and I knew I could review the material quickly. Well, any illusions I had about how my ability to give a twenty minute talk to an audience with the appropriate background would transfer to being in charge of my own classroom for a semester were quickly dashed. Students came in with all levels of background with an array of learning styles, and needs from their classroom experience. I managed to keep my head just above water, and reach the few students who learned well from non-interactive power point lectures. Despite it being a struggle, I did learn some very valuable lessons; don't only pay attention to the three students who are nodding their heads in understanding, don't get stuck in the same classroom format day in and day out, and when you don't know the answer to the question- just admit it. I also learned that being a worthy teacher is a challenge, and I was determined to do better.

As I progress throughout my teaching career, I realize the lessons never stop coming. This aspect is one of the biggest draws I have towards a teaching career. Each set of students presents a unique challenge and, in turn, a unique reward. I had developed the habit of checking in with students with anonymous teaching evaluations early in the semester to explore what is and is not working for them. Although the solution inevitably involves a varied approach to presenting material, I have found success in making tweaks to how I weight different approaches. For example, I there was a lot of variability between the students in two sections of

Brain and Behavior over different semesters. One class had a majority of students who prefer a more traditional lecture style, mixed with board work to explain the more in depth concepts. For the other section, I have heads on the desk if power points consume more than half of the class period. They prefer group discussions and opportunities to split up the information and practice on each other. I feel as though when students feel like they have a voice, and their professor hears them, classroom engagement improves. It is a great feeling to see students really delving into the material with curiosity and excitement.

Beyond tailoring the learning experience for the classroom, the most rewarding experiences I have had during my short teaching career derive from interactions with individual students. Whether a student comes to meet with me regarding a hardship that requires accommodation in the classroom, is seeking clarity on a tough concept in class, or simply needs tips on how to better prepare for a quiz or exam, I am always delighted to provide assistance. I recently had a student inform me that they were really hesitant to come to office hours of a professor because she felt as though she is interrupting work that they might be doing. However, upon the warm welcome she received from me, she says she will be harassing her professors every semester! I plan to share this story at the start of next semester to hopefully provide even more encouragement for these one-on-one interactions.

When it comes to teaching, I still have so much to learn. As is the case with many individuals seeking careers in academia, I am driven by this challenge. I love to absorb all I can about different ways of teaching. Whether it be sitting in on colleagues' lectures, reading blogs about active learning in a scientific classroom, or reading books on how to 'make it stick', I strive to create the most effective and empowering experience for students that I possibly can. As mentioned in my cover letter, I have had a chance to teach several diverse classes, and would love the opportunity to continue being exposed to new material as well as teaching courses I have experience with.