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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Many years ago, when my mom taught me how to cook, we started small. The first meal I remember making by myself was mac and cheese from a box. It was not a complicated meal because my mom understood my limited cooking experience and I needed clear instructions to follow. I was not yet ready to go off the menu and prepare a perfectly seared steak or a soufflé. Learning to cook takes guidance, practice, and experience. When I was first learning I needed my mom to guide me, as I progressed I could add my own personal touch to recipes, and now I can create my own recipes. I take a similar scaffolding approach to teaching as I do to cooking. New students whet their appetite for communication with clear instruction and practice, while more seasoned students get a more refined taste of theory and are asked to add their own personal touch to the communication recipe.

Cooking metaphors aside, my goal as an instructor is to help students in all stages of their academic lives and this starts in classes such as *Human Communication* which includes teaching public speaking. Many of the students in this class are freshmen meaning they are likely new to the college environment and have limited experience with public speaking. I always start with the basics. I try to start every class with an activity or assignment that helps students practice skills such as writing in APA style, outlining a speech, or limiting filler words. One activity I particularly enjoy helps students increase their confidence in public speaking. I have them pick two items from a bag of images. Their goal is to combine those items in a creative way and sell their new item to the class. This activity boosts confidence, creates comradery in the classroom, helps them practice speech structure, and gives them a taste of persuasive public speaking. Activities and assignments like this one pave the way for the next four years of classes and beyond by fostering the development of fundamental skills.

As these students move on to upper-level courses, the content gets more comprehensive and they will have a new set of challenges in their own lives. Many of them now have jobs or internships, campus groups, significant others, and familial obligations that take up a lot of their time. This means that I have to make every second of the class count. Busy, active, and involved students often take courses such as *Group and Leadership Communication*, to both fulfill course requirements and learn valuable workplace skills. As such, when I teach this course, I want to meet them where they are. These students have already completed the basic courses and thus have a general understanding of theory. At this point, I want to encourage them to demonstrate their knowledge. One of the easiest ways to do this is to ask students to apply course concepts and theory to their own lives. I ask my students to start paying attention to their lives and the media they watch and apply the course theories to their experiences. One assignment has them apply the lesson on cohesion and groupthink to the movie *Mean Girls*. This allows for discussion about the pros and cons of cohesion in an enjoyable way. This assignment has had positive results in terms of knowledge retention on exams as well. Having assignments that encourage deeper understanding ensure that the time these students can devote to coursework is worth it. They are busy and need to manage their time well and I want to make sure my assignments help them meaningfully learn the material in an interactive way.

In conclusion, no matter what stage my students are at in their university career I want to give them the tools to succeed in any learning environment and help them learn about communication. I plan specific activities to help students learn course materials in ways they can comprehend and enjoy. This teaching style prepares the younger students for future success and gives upperclassmen opportunities for application of knowledge and mastery of a subject. Some students need to start with mac and cheese in a box, while others are ready for the soufflé, and I am ready to meet them where they are.