Statement of Teaching Philosophy – W. Stewart Thomas

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Teaching and education have changed considerably over the last several decades. Sure the tried and true practices of teaching and academic work ethic remain prominent, but students have changed and the way they perceive their education, as well as how they learn, has evolved. The challenge for educators today is to assess a students’ past education exposure, access their current ability to learn, and plan how to transform their minds into leaders of tomorrow.

My teaching philosophy includes the following philosophical and practical components:

- Utilizing technology (which business students will be forced to utilize in the future)
- Exemplify continuous improvement through course delivery as well as practice of concepts
- Placing students in real world experiences with “reality checks” along the way
- Utilize research to raise the bar of transformational learning and discovery
- Lead By Example and provide lifelong confidence and trust in oneself

Philosophical Component - Use of Technology and Preliminary Assessment for Learning

In some courses student success does not come easy. I find these situations to be a challenge which is well received. ACC 2270 (Financial Accounting) is one of the most difficult courses for School of Business students at UNC Pembroke. DFW rates traditionally have been high in this course. In 2003 I first adapted the use of pretesting to allow students to assess student learning of accounting and provide information on areas of improvement for tutoring. This method proved to be quite successful Raising the undergraduate final grades in the course buy 1.25 quality points and showing significant improvement in DFW rates from the 40% range to the 80% range of students achieving a “C” or better in the class. In 2013 I served as lead author of “Adept Learning Cycles Using Student Tutors Improve Performance of Introductory Financial Accounting Students” published in the peer reviewed journal, International Journal of Education Research.
Shortly after in 2014 I added the element of technology to assist in administering pretest. Since pretesting was initially conducted by tutors who had to hand grade the assessments, the use of technology streamlined assessment and scoring allowing tutors to spend more time assisting students.

**Philosophical Component - Continuous improvement of course delivery**

In March of 2020, the COVID 19 pandemic swept the world. Quickly our traditional face to face class environment was threatened and jeopardized. My response to this was to continue teaching face to face, but also allow students the flexibility to participate in class in three different ways. Face to face, synchronous Webex, and asynchronous online were all combined into one course delivery method offering students the flexibility for a face to face experience, as well as students impacted by the virus an opportunity to continue the course. The use of Webex technology coupled with Canvas provided the infrastructure to deliver these multiple course delivery opportunities in one single course offering. Students impacted from the virus could also go back and watch recorded lectures as well as make up work within the canvas environment. Withdrawal rates from the two classes converted to this style were minimal during the Spring 2020 term and student progress was maximized.

**Impact of Technology, Assessment, and Course Delivery improvements** - During COVID 19 Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 terms students taught earned a “C” or better in ACC 2270 87% and 75%, respectively.

**Philosophical Component**

- **Placing students in real world practice – Assessment of Progress in Current Program Stage**

The use of learning tools within courses often provides students with a “reality check” of where they stand within their selected major and concentration. For accounting students, this is an important part of the learning process. Use of simulations such as “Systems Understanding Aid” (or SUA) allow students to utilize their skills to date in their respective programs and access their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for better performance. The SUA used in ACC 4130 requires students to
go through a simulation for a real-life company, preparing a full set of financial statements from start to finish while incorporating real life “roadblocks” and “hazards” that test student awareness and skill. Students find this philosophy provides them with a sense of where they often stand in becoming a successful accounting professional.

**Philosophical Component – Research**

Academics pride their work especially their hard-earned research. The desire to completely immerse one’s self into an area where one discovers new and exciting discoveries is exhilarating. I pride myself in researching cutting edge technology and methods to advance business decision making. Using my research in courses allows me to share the excitement and extremely useful methods for young professional success and leadership. I utilize my research to serve as an introduction, immersion, and in-depth learning experience for students especially in graduate courses. For example, my recent A Journal article published in the *Journal of Accountancy* entitled, “Power BI – an analytical view” provides the basis for graduate students to learn what business intelligence is, how it can be used to solve advanced business problems, while providing them the software and hands on use of summarizing tens of thousands to million lines of data into useful information.

**Philosophical Component - Lead By Example and provide lifelong confidence and trust in oneself**

If I am lucky, I have four years to make a difference in the life of a future leader and business professional. Leading by example is one of the most important components of learning. Servant leadership, paying it forward, making a difference in holistic ways is what I strive for in every student I contact. From students taught in 2001 and throughout my 20 years as an educator I have developed lifelong relationships through mentorship and trust, instilling confidence necessary for success. My commitment and promise to students do not end with graduation. One of the joys of an educator is to experience and witness success of students. To receive a call announcing a promotion, new business
venture, marriage, childbirth, or perhaps Christmas morning wishes or Happy Birthday wishes – these are the priceless victories of a professor. Witnessing firsthand perhaps a small (or very large) impact that turned into something amazing. This is worth more than money can buy.

The Total Teaching Experience

Many professors and students fall victim to the reliance on classroom instruction alone in association with total student accountability as the ingredients to student excellence. I find this approach inferior leaving the student in a vulnerable state more likely to find failure than success (see below chart).

My total teaching experience is grounded by meaning and memorable classroom instruction, being totally accessible at UNCP and in out of class. The underlying values that lead to the implementation of this philosophy are effective communication, challenging the student, leading by example, and motivating the student. The total experience prepares a student for success by instilling the confidence necessary to succeed in the course requirement and lifetime exposure to like circumstances.
The “Total Teaching Experience” directs as student with no variability to success and confidence. This model is the product of years of experience, student interaction, and senior advice.

**Conclusion** - Finally, my philosophy includes the admission that I will constantly, and forever be a learner as well as an educator, loving the University that gave me the opportunity to share and grow as a person. In my professional life prior to being an educator, I visited many and never visited one where I did not learn something. It is that same hunger for learning that we as educators strive to bring out in our students trusting what we share with them today, transforms their lives and the lives of our entire world tomorrow.