

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Rosemarie L. Coste, Ph.D.

I have learned from good teachers in a variety of fields; while I have borrowed ideas from many, my overall approach to teaching is most like that of my on-the-job teachers in the Information Technology workplace, my colleagues in technical support and systems programming. Like them, my teaching is motivated by the goal of developing independent thinkers, able to act decisively and usefully with ever-decreasing support from me. Many years of on-call responsibilities and technical team leadership instilled in me the belief that the more I can share my knowledge and skills, the better my life will be. The lone keeper of esoteric knowledge is unlikely to find a moment of peace, while the leader of a strong and confident team not only gains freedom for personal development and creativity but improves the quality of work and levels of self-satisfaction for everyone involved.

My teaching experience has brought me into contact with a broad range of learners, including adult professionals and undergraduate and elementary students, working in a variety of settings and subjects. For all, I have adapted an approach to teaching that creates a clear and predictable structure within which there is ample room for flexibility and personalization. I imagine my students as my project team; I tell them this, and begin every course by identifying what our project is, defining our roles within the team, establishing project schedules and milestones, and clarifying where we have room for choice and which requirements—such as a University's firm deadline for semester grades—are beyond our control. In addition to gaining a grasp of the course's subject matter, I want my students to see that subject matter and all the elements of the course, including themselves and me, within a larger context of long-term collaboration and cooperative construction. What they learn connects them to the larger culture; what they create, with me or in their later work, contributes to that culture.

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In addition to establishing a transparent working environment in which expectations and relationships are obvious and consistent, I provide my students with tools by which they can move beyond what we are able to cover in the limited time of our coursework. In part, this means I devote classroom time to sharing not only what I know, but how I learned it: I bring in books and other reference material from my personal collection; I create safe opportunities for experimentation; I provide extensive suggestions of additional sources of information, positioning myself and our course material as starting points on what, for interested students, can become a life-long investigation. I also believe strongly in providing my students with real-life models of the work I ask them to do. For example, in talking with my Technical Writing students about developing their writing portfolios for use in future job applications, I brought in my own portfolio and an advertisement for a Technical Writing position and had them work with me on selecting and organizing examples of my work and creating a cover letter to point out how strongly those examples relate to the description of the position.

By treating the classroom as a workplace in which mutually-respectful creative thinkers collaborate to meet shared goals, I educate my students not only in the subject matter of the moment but in habits of thought and work that will serve them well in their future endeavors. Because my own career has included teaching and non-teaching positions, this approach also allows me to maintain a personal sense of consistency and stability within what might otherwise seem to be disconnected experiences: I believe all work can benefit from good teaching, as experienced employees lead and advise the less-experienced; I also believe all teaching can benefit from the habits of planning, coordination, and respectful collaboration that are found in a good workplace.