

Teaching Statement

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In teaching I have three goals: first, to establish a rapport that fosters student participation and encourages them to ask questions; second, to give students the independence to believe in themselves; and third, to introduce them to new challenges.

For the instructor the greatest challenge is to get students to ask questions and participate in classroom discussions. Students are often reticent, even in small classes. One of my primary goals in the classroom has become to encourage students to discard their fear of embarrassment and ask questions. By asking questions they facilitate learning not only from the answer, but also by showing me how to adjust the pace and style of my material, making me more effective. It does no good for me or the students to attempt to build on material they do not yet comprehend. I have seen over and over that students who readily ask questions very soon no longer need to, because the process of formulating good questions often brings them to the answers they seek — or sparks a curiosity that drives them to deeper research.

My second goal is to show students that they can think and act independently. Learning cannot be forced. Students must learn to trust their instincts and believe that they can solve big problems using the tools I've shown them, and that they can invent their own tools. I know I've succeeded when students show me work they have done, sometimes for another class and sometimes projects they've undertaken on their own.

That leads me to my final goal: I challenge students to explore new areas of computer science. Because the discipline changes and evolves so rapidly, the subject matter of every course we teach is a moving target, so broad as to be impossible to cover completely. I encourage students to explore regions that even I have yet to visit. When given room to explore, students can choose a path that excites them, and when they are excited, they work harder and learn more. Many students are able and eager to push creative and programming frontiers far beyond those presented in the classroom. I encourage them to do so.