

SYNTHESIS AND APPLICATION ESSAY 1

I have learned skills and techniques from four Certificate of Accomplishment in Teaching (CoAT) workshops that I can use to further improve the way I plan a course from the outset. I took these workshops over the course of two years, spanning the time before I started teaching, through teaching labs, and through teaching my own course. At each step of this process, I have been able to improve my course planning, which has improved my teaching overall.

I took *Introduction to Teaching* one year before I began teaching. The material in this workshop introduced me to the CoAT program and gave me a concrete idea of what I would eventually do as a teacher. The workshop focused on lesson planning and techniques to evaluate student learning.

A month before I started teaching lab sections, I took *Establishing Credibility and Authority in the Classroom*. I chose to take this seminar because I was worried that my age could make it difficult for me to establish credibility with my students. This course focused on verbal and nonverbal communication as well as conveying content expertise.

While I was teaching lab sections, I took *Writing Learning Outcomes*. In this workshop I learned how to write specific and tangible goals for my students. I have used these goals both as major themes to connect my lectures as well as a way to evaluate students.

During my second year of teaching, I completed the *Teaching Philosophy/Teaching Portfolio Kickstart and Polish* workshop. This seminar helped me collect and focus all the work I had done throughout the CoAT program and my teaching assignments. This course

focused on writing a teaching philosophy and how to create an online teaching portfolio from all the resources I had gathered throughout teaching.

Before taking these classes, I had never thought about writing a syllabus or considered how important it was for creating and guiding a course. After writing syllabi and referring back to them throughout a semester, I understand how useful they can be. From the *Introduction to Teaching* and *Writing Learning Outcomes* workshops, I learned to be very specific about the goals I have for my students. In writing these Learning Outcomes, I learned that using active verbs (like interpret or graph) makes the goals clearer and more easily evaluated. Learning Outcomes also serve as a guide to the entire class. At any point during the semester, a student can refer back to these long-term goals in order to identify what I expect them to get out of the course. I have realized that giving students clear expectations makes it easier for them to realize when they are not meeting those goals, and having the expectations on paper reminds students that I do have big picture goals for them.

After teaching for three semesters, the *Teaching Philosophy/Teaching Portfolio Kickstart and Polish* workshop reinforced ideas from other workshops and forced me to think critically about my overarching goals as a teacher. The challenge I had with this workshop was translating my vague ideas into concrete objectives on a page. This workshop helped me put my ideas into words and also helped me refine my goals. I realized that my goals for a class are based on the students who are taking the class as well as the course content. For instance, my goals in teaching a macroeconomics course to economics majors differ from my goals in teaching the same class to non-majors. This

consideration has made my course objectives much more manageable and applicable to my students.

Application of all these ideas can be seen in my EC 202 syllabus. On the first page I lay out several specific goals for students. For example, “Students will be able to explain how the supply of money can affect real economic indicators, such as real gross domestic product.” This is a concrete goal that I can easily test by asking students a short answer question. I also refer back to these goals as I introduce course content. Following the above example, rather than starting a lecture with definitions or a model, I begin by asking students if money can affect real variables, which are corrected for inflation. I pause for a moment to give the students time to remember the concepts of nominal and real variables and start to form a hypothesis or question. This encourages students to connect the lectures into a story rather than memorizing several distinct facts.

My syllabus also establishes authority, stating that no extra credit will be offered and that “disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated and could result in...” expulsion from class that day. As I discuss the syllabus on the first day of class, I stress that these are non-negotiable. In my first semester teaching a lab, I did not include the line about extra credit and about 15 students asked for it. Since I have included that explicit statement, no students have asked for extra credit opportunities. Students understand that they have to take the course seriously and will not be given any “do-over’s.” Having established authority with my syllabus, I can teach in a way that feels natural to me while still holding the students to strict expectations.

Through creating my teaching philosophy and portfolio, I have designed my course to meet the big-picture goals I have for that class. For instance, for a class of non-majors

taking macroeconomics, I assigned a group presentation and a final paper. These reflect my goals of improving the students' research, presentation, and writing skills. Because they are non-majors, I do not expect the students to remember the details of each model several years after the course. To leave them with an experience they will remember and grow from, I chose assignments that will improve their applicable skills. In most professions, it is useful to be able to summarize and present any information you have collected.