

## **TEACHING STATEMENT**

As an instructor in a field that is perpetually evolving, I believe it is my responsibility to continually adapt to changes and regularly reevaluate learning objectives. At the same time, I also realize that certain learning objectives for MIS students remain constant: analyzing questions and problems critically, communicating well, understanding how social and technical systems interact, and working effectively at the individual and group levels. I aim to integrate these objectives into each course I teach, whether it is an introductory business course or an upper level technical course. In the spirit of “continual evolution,” I have transitioned to the Team-Based Learning (TBL) and flipped classroom methodologies, and through these have revitalized my ability to reach students with the key takeaways from my courses.

Teaching is not only an integral part of my contribution to the field of management information systems, but also challenges me to increase my students’ abilities to contemplate pragmatically problems outside of their areas of expertise. TBL facilitates this outcome, structuring a course as modules during which permanent teams of students hold one another accountable for individual preliminary work that feeds into longer-term, multidisciplinary team projects requiring thoughtfulness and application of knowledge. These team projects, and the internal competitiveness to perform highly that develops through the semester across teams, help to engage students who are simply uninterested in the subject matter and would otherwise not make great efforts to understand the material or complete scaffolding work on their own time. Students taking Intro to IS as a requirement, for example, respond enthusiastically to the problem-based team projects and show interest when asked to think about IS as it intersects with other functions of an organization. Conversely, students with an innate interest in IS find the course structure interesting and innovative, and are challenged to serve in leadership positions within their teams to improve communication and interpersonal skills.

My teaching philosophy is based in part on my motivation to minimize the thinking gap that so often plagues students who resist engaging in deep levels of problem solving and evaluation in the classroom. TBL enables me to provoke students to deliberate over questions that may be solved by adding knowledge from our field to their primary areas of interest. When students are challenged to innovate while approaching solutions to tough problems, I find they often rise to the occasion and even relish the experience to contribute their own experience and knowledge. For example, instead of designing a predetermined data model, I might ask my students to design a data model based on an iPhone app geared toward solving a problem in their field of specialty. While this may mean extra teaching and grading, I find this extra flexibility enhances engagement by allowing students to tap into their personal interests, thereby linking IS as relevant to any industry or career they might go into. I have had fashion design majors embrace MIS in part due to the Team Based Learning approach!

Inherent in the TBL approach, I address the problem of “passive learning” by playing the role of “guide” in my classes. I aim to convince my students to find and understand answers to pressing business and societal issues on their own, without my handing them answers to memorize. I aspire to foster curiosity and gently steer my students in their learning. This viewpoint extends to software and infrastructures as well: it is less

important to me that they learn a particular application on a particular operating system, than that they learn how to identify underlying problems and cultivate the capacity to locate and explore tools to solve these problems. Particularly in technical courses, I try to foster self-assurance in my students when it comes to tasks that many find intimidating such as downloading and configuring applications, running and interacting with servers, and generally exploring systems and tools.

As a corollary to challenging my students to think innovatively, I also like to provide them the opportunity to debate, and thus defend, their perspectives. I find that once students venture into expressing their opinions, they typically begin to engage the material and topics more critically. Team Based Learning requires this level of intra-team debate during their team assessments, and involves inter-team interaction at the close of the team projects. I can moderate these dialogues, guiding the students according to my intended course objectives while simultaneously tapping into their thought processes and levels of comprehension for purposes of learning assessment. When this progression is sustained within the constraints of the course structure and explicit syllabus, I find my students are quite able to flourish as thinkers. It is my assumption that these engaged thinkers gain far more from my classes than those who remain disconnected.

As a caveat, I have taught online for the past two years, and have found that experience challenging to my overall philosophy of teaching. It is difficult to engage students in exactly the same way, despite the fact that instructors are expected to teach at an equally engaging level whether online or face-to-face. I am continually experimenting with incorporating aspects of TBL into my online courses, but acknowledge that deep engagement in a completely virtual classroom requires different approaches. On a practical level, without having students co-located or even in the same time zone, it is challenging to recreate the intense team-based problem solving that is so accessible in a face-to-face setting and that results in such highly engaged students. However, I have found that concerning myself with other facets of creating a rich and realistic environment have drastically improved learning outcomes in my online courses. One of the most critical components, in my experience, is the use of multiple social tools through which the students can form a real sense of community for learning, instead of simply progressing through the online material as a disconnected individual.