Purposeful Teaching

Teaching somebody to fish is better than giving them a fish (How does this apply to your classes?)

Giving fish: factual knowledge and grades.

Teaching fishing: teaching about the process of learning, imparting love for learning, developing students’ skills in critical thinking, analytical/intellectual/scientific inquiry, communication, presentation, writing, visual literacy…

Learning is a process that extends beyond the classroom. We plant seeds that will keep growing, we open doors and windows to concepts and ideas that the students will keep exploring after the class is over.

Be clear on why the material is important to you, and why it is relevant to the students. Talk to them about the value of teaching and learning

Share your enthusiasm about the learning process and the subject matter.

Acknowledge that you learn from your students.

Make students responsible for their learning process by challenging them to work hard.

(Point out that you work hard for them, so they should work hard for them too.) Usually students rise to the expectations, especially if you are as committed as you want them to be.

Confidence in the Classroom

Perfect/ideal courses do not exist (don’t set impossible goals). Aim for fruitful courses instead, and see them as work in progress.

You know much more than your students.

Be comfortable with and honest about what you don’t know (such occasions are learning opportunities for you, but they can also allow you to connect with the students on a more personal level). You cannot possibly know everything there is to know on a given subject, and if the occasion arises, you can admit to your students that you haven’t thought about their question before, and you need time to think about it and come back to them with more information and suggestions. Don’t be embarrassed by such moments, be excited (they are learning opportunities for all). Make sure you do come back to the students with your thoughts and answers at a later point.

Train your mind to translate stress into excitement, focus on positive aspects of a challenge. If for example you are uncomfortable speaking to large audiences, you can say to yourself: how exciting I have the chance to share my interests with so many people, to engage them and to get their feedback. How exciting, I have the chance to overcome my fears and become a better public speaker. How exciting, I have the chance to improve. Don’t be discouraged if you cannot
reach and engage all the students at the same level, this is normal, as not all people have the
same interests and goals.

Before class, practice confidence body postures that condition your mind to embrace confidence
as well. Watch
http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are

Also before class try brief meditation sessions (even for 1 minute) that help you focus and relax.
Include your audience in the meditation to reinforce your sense of community and connectivity.

Do not be your own worst critic, acknowledge your achievements, and recognize what needs
improvement as an opportunity for growth.

**Time Management**

Take it one step at a time, do not be overwhelmed by the entire scope of the project in front of
you.

**Don’t over-prepare. Be selective. Information overload exhausts both you and the students.**
When you prepare less, you might be more creative and focus on fewer and more important
issues.

Do not try to fit in the quarter system what you would normally teach in a semester.

Do not overload students with readings. You can include optional/recommended readings in your
material for those students who want more.

Use a list of numbered comments and provide the key, for faster feedback on written
assignments.

Keep your guidelines on assignments and exams clear and brief.

Direct students to appropriate resources (e.g. writing tutors, TAs). Don’t try to do everything
yourself.

Offer group meetings if numerous students want office hours or mentoring.

**Do not indulge student requests that ask you to do their work for them (e.g. request for
class notes or definitions of terms). Explain why you say “no”.** For example, some students
want PowerPoint presentations posted before class –explain why this is not possible. Some
students might say they want notes on the PowerPoint –but research shows they learn better if
they take notes themselves, not if they read your notes on the screen and online.

Limit the time you answer emails at specific slots in the day (e.g. that time in the day when you
are less productive on teaching preparation or research).

You can choose not to reply to emails with substantive questions, but invite the student to visit
you at office hours instead.

Ask students to read the syllabus as an assignment in the first week of class, have them discuss it
in pairs or groups (e.g. at section time in the first week), and answer each other’s questions
before they ask you or the TAs.
Say no to major service requirements until tenure (you are actually not expected to have major service until then. But commit to some departmental and college service that will help you learn about your colleagues, students, and the possibilities you have to contribute to the communities you are part of.)

Recharge your batteries (in nature or in any other way that works for you). Take those breaks when it is most appropriate for you, listen to your needs. For example, you can use meal breaks and the time you walk on campus to disengage from work.

**Presentation/Communication Skills, Generating Dialogue**

Ask your mentors and department colleagues if they could attend one of your classes and give you feedback, and if you could attend one of theirs. See what works and what doesn’t in other people’s lectures.

Be lively, color and project your voice, occasionally walk towards the audience, gesture, crack a joke (if it comes naturally to you), show your enthusiasm about the material.

Be willing to experiment and learn from your mistakes. Teaching is a constant learning process.

**Do not assume students have prior knowledge of anything.**

Make the material relevant to them by drawing connections with their experiences and concerns.

**Classroom climate:** read *Teaching across cultural strengths: A guide to balancing integrated and individuated cultural frameworks in college teaching*, by Alicia Fedelina Chavez and Susan Diana Longerbeam (highly recommended by Jody Greene).

Diversify the modality of presentation and interaction (e.g. PowerPoint, video, sound projection, physical activity, brief quiz, clicker test, free-write, drawing assignment, discussion in pairs, role-playing). Visit FITC and ask their input with resources and suggestions. If you want to use a tablet and follow the presentation suggestions by Tracy Larrabee, download Classroom Presenter (free from the University of Washington) on any windows tablet.

Invite participation by asking both factual and interpretative questions. Use the Socratic method as much as you can.

**Give extra credit for participation,** and encourage everyone to contribute according to certain guidelines (e.g. speak loudly, raise their hand, not use offensive language…) An easy way to keep participation records is to ask students at the end of each lecture to either circle their name on the roster, or write down their name in a note pad. Ask them to do that in front of you, at the front of the classroom, so you have an additional opportunity to learn their names. You can say at the beginning of the quarter that those who participate consistently and already have a strong letter grade can earn the higher step (e.g. a strong B+ can become an A- with good participation).

**Create a safe environment for students to participate, by emphasizing the following:**

- We all learn from each other.

- All opinions are valid as personal views –but we need to be aware of their subjectivity and learn to argue them convincingly.
**All participation counts as contribution.** Off-topic, improbable, or inaccurate answers, or clarification questions are welcomed because they give you the opportunity to better explain things to everybody. Emphasize this at the beginning of the course, and say that for the instructor it is very encouraging to have students participate, even when the answers they give are not applicable to the material (because that is still a sign that those students are attentive and engaged). Thank students throughout the course when they ask clarification questions or they alert you to something they misunderstood through the replies they give (so they do not hesitate to continue their contribution).

-Validate students’ answers (acknowledge their reasoning) first, encourage them to develop their thoughts, argue their point; then ask other student to share their opinions and arguments; finally add your comments.

-Ask students to tell you their name when they participate in discussion –so that you can gradually learn them.

**Feedback and Evaluations**

**Using a midterm evaluation process** has many advantages: students feel involved; they share their concerns; you have the opportunity to address them, change things, or explain why you don’t. See sample midterm reflection/evaluation forms shared by Jody Greene and Maria Evangelatou. See [this reading](#) about midterm evaluations as a “metacognitive pause”. If you use specific learning outcomes on your syllabus (as you are probably required to do by your department), you can include relevant questions in your midterm evaluations, to see if your students feel they are achieving those learning goals.

**Short feedback every week or every other week** can also be very productive (especially in smaller classes). At the last lecture of the week ask students to reply to the following questions on a piece of paper: 1. What is the most important thing you learned up to now, and why is it important to you? 2. Is there a major question that you would like me to answer, clarify, etc.? 3. Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

You can anonymize the evaluation process/forms. Or you can ask them to write their names, so that they are more accountable of their feedback and the way they deliver it (they don’t hide behind anonymity to write aggressive, offensive comments). In that case it helps to point out that you are never anonymous as recipient of their feedback, so their anonymity introduces an imbalance that can become an obstacle to fair feedback.

**Do not engage complaining students through email, request to talk to them in person.**

Ask your colleagues’ advice if you are uncertain about how to deal with a situation.

Use constructive evaluation criticism to improve. **Do not be discouraged by unfair comments (everybody gets them).**

Build students’ trust in you by being honest with them and letting them see your humanity (e.g. be honest about what you don’t know, what affects you or touches you the most in class material or in student behavior and why. I always tell my students I am dyslexic and apologize for any spelling mistakes my materials might include!)
Assignments/Exams

Explain what you expect students to learn from each assignment or exam.

Include all requirements in the syllabus. Give them clear instructions about essays and exams. Clarify expectations and evaluations.

Space the assignments in ways that allow students time to absorb and utilize what they learn and to use the feedback from previous assignment to improve the next one. Good timing also allows TAs to grade and give back comments before the next assignment is due.

Hold students accountable/responsible for implementing the feedback they get: you can ask them to include a reflection paragraph on the previous assignment for each new assignment (e.g. they have list all the shortcomings of the previous paper and what they did to address them in the new paper). Make this a graded component of the assignment. Reward students who actually improve based on your feedback and their extra effort.

Use appropriate resources (on campus, online, etc.) to support students’ performance. For some examples see the material on “writing resources and helpful material for students” (circulated through email and shared online).

Aim for a variety of writing and exam assignments that cultivate different skills and are appropriate for different modes of learning (quiz, flash-card poll, essay exam, short visual analysis, film papers, research papers, group project, role-playing...). But in order to improve their skills on writing you also need to offer them some recurring writing assignments (e.g. rewrites). On-offs of written assignments will not allow students to improve.

If you use essay questions for the exams, consider providing the questions weeks ahead of time, so that students can focus their study accordingly.

Post the best papers as examples for all the class (Dropbox), anonymously or eponymously according to what the authors of the papers prefer.

Do not use your own performance as a student to evaluate UCSC students (most of them will not become university professors, and have gone through a very different educational system). Share this comment with your TAs, and ask them not to use their own student performance as a standard either.

Working with TAs

Meet TAs before the quarter starts as a group to discuss class structure, expectations, and workload. Continue to meet with them once a week through the quarter. Group meetings with TAs can also allow the more experienced of them to share their knowledge and suggestions with the group.

Be mindful of TA workload when you plan the assignments of your course.

Do sample grading as a group.

Use numbered comments and the relevant key of comments to help TAs in efficient grading that is not time-consuming.
Provide study questions to students and TAs to guide and structure their work. You can post the study questions online but also show them in the class. Every week use one of those study questions for a quiz, to encourage students to do the readings and absorb the material.

For courses without sections you might consider turning TA office hours into optional sections, so that they can have group discussions. You need to arrange this with your department (for the scheduling of a class space). Especially for large classes, it is ideal if each TA can hold one hour of optional section and one office hour, so group discussions do not exclude the possibility for students to have one-on-one meetings if they need them (but you need to factor this into the TA workload). The advantage of group sessions/optional sections is that TAs don’t need to repeat the same things to individual students, and they can work as a group to prepare for class assignments. You might consider using a hybrid model, in which you offer optional sections/group sessions especially before exams and major assignment submissions. Remember that optional sections cannot be a graded component, nor can they be used for extra credit – because some students might want to participate but they have scheduling conflicts, so they would miss the grading or extra credit opportunity because of that.

**Academic Integrity**

Use clear definitions and guidelines in the syllabus and in your assignment prompts (see relevant material provided by Jody Greene).

Not all incidents are willful plagiarism (consider cultural issues, students who really don’t know how to cite sources, etc.). See also the article recommended by Amy Mihyang Ginther: “Epistemologies: Are Our Research Epistemologies Racially Biased?”, by James Joseph Scheurich and Michelle D. Young, *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (May, 1997), pp. 4-16 (shared through email and online).

You can also tell students you use Turnitin.com even if you don’t, to discourage them from plagiarizing.

Wikipedia can be a useful tool if students acknowledge they used it, and they are also aware of its limitations. (Remind your students that Wikipedia does not always provide reliable information so they need to fact-check and expand their research beyond it. You can point out that Wikipedia might be more effective for simple clarifications of terms, or for some basic suggestions on a few research resources, but its entries should not be taken for granted as comprehensive and reliable discourse on any given topic.)

**Ecommons**

Selecting to offer fewer tools that you actually use, is more productive than cluttering the home page with several things you don’t use.

Organizing the resources by week folders can be rather helpful for students to navigate the material.

You can use an additional folder to provide writing resources (e.g. info on writing tutors, your own guidelines on writing, resources on developing a thesis statement etc.).

Another folder can be dedicated to exam material and instructions (e.g. in subfolders for midterm and final).
Consider using Dropbox as an additional way of submitting written assignments: not instead of but in addition to the hard copy, so that you have an electronic receipt of submission and a digital copy to use if needed (e.g. to post as an example of a good paper for the class to see –with the author’s permission).

Include a wejoinin.com link for your office hours, e.g. at the top of the resources page.

**DRC (Disability Resource Center)**

About 26% of our students identify themselves as having some kind of disability. You should follow the steps below to support their equal access to education.

Post articles and required reading lists early (preferably months before the beginning of the course) so that the DRC can convert materials for students using assistive technology to access reading texts. Posted reading material should be clean (free of notes and underlining, not crooked).

Make course content accessible (websites, PowerPoints, PDFs, etc. For support, visit the Faculty Instructional Technology Center at McHenry Library (http://its.ucsc.edu/fitc/). A great online resource can be found here: http://www.pcc.edu/resources/instructionalsupport/

**During your first lecture and in the syllabus**, request that students with DRC needs come see you in person, during office hours or after lecture. Ask them to arrange this meeting within the first two weeks of class, to submit their DRC form and discuss the challenges they face and how you could help them. Remember that everything you discuss, including the names of students, are confidential material.

Make a list of the needs you have to address in exams, and ask your department and DRC to help with resources.

If you teach big classes and have many DRC requests, consider assigning take-home exams (e.g. essay questions, if they serve your class objectives), to reduce the logistical pressure of accommodating several different DRC requirements.

Always use captioned videos and only purchase videos that are already captioned (they benefit visual learners, international students or those who are learning English as a second language, those with hearing impairment or sitting somewhere in the classroom where sound projections is not clear enough).

The following is provided by DRC Director Rick Gubash

**Disability Statement to Students in Class**

**We ask that you incorporate the following paragraph in your course syllabus, website, and class announcements:** UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me privately during my office hours or by appointment, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. At this time, we would also like us to discuss ways we can ensure your full participation in the course. We
encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

**Universal Design**

Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) is an approach to curriculum that minimizes barriers and maximizes learning to meet the needs of all students. UDI relies on three principles: (1) using a variety of mediums for instruction, including audio (e.g. lecture), visual (e.g. video), kinesthetic (e.g. acting out a scene), etc.; (2) providing multiple forms of assessment, such as papers, presentations, projects, debates, etc.; and (3) utilizing different ways to engage and motivate students. When designing your future courses, consider how both classroom and curricular design may pose barriers for your students. When possible, implement UDI practices to increase student success. Information about UDI and its application in postsecondary settings can be found here: [http://www.washington.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-designeducation/](http://www.washington.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-designeducation/)

**DRC Resources**

For additional information, please view the faculty and staff link on the DRC website ([http://drc.ucsc.edu/fac-staff/faculty/index.html](http://drc.ucsc.edu/fac-staff/faculty/index.html)). DRC service coordinators are available to consult faculty and staff on disability-related questions, including DRC referrals and inclusive design. The DRC is also available for presentations on a variety of topics, including UDI, stigma and bias, disability identity, working with DRC students, and more. Please contact DRC Director Rick Gubash by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at rgubash@ucsc.edu if you have additional questions.