Statement of Teaching Philosophy

In the Organizational Dynamics program, I employ an innovative team- and case-based teaching approach that is especially suited for our highly diverse student population of business professionals. In my opinion, good teaching consists of inspiring students to learn about the issues that interest them and motivating them to find answers to their questions. Saint-Exupéry stated it best: “You can teach men to build ships by logging trees, building a timber-construction and assembling timber to the frame – or you can teach them the desire for the sea and the endless horizon!”

In order to motivate my students, I try to understand them and to relate the concepts of the courses I teach to students’ lives. These connections are easy to establish in the field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology where students are generally very interested and eager to discuss and explore the concepts and theories. I try to focus student’s attention on organizational processes, and raise students’ awareness about effective and less effective team and leadership behaviors. My classes focus heavily on the practical aspects of theory applications as well as imparting skills and developing leadership qualities through reflective practice. Students develop solutions to real world organizational problems and have worked on projects for companies such as American Airlines, Cox Communications, Hilti, Nordam, State Farm, and Tulsa Technology Center among others.

I agree with Lave & Wenger (1991) who argue that learning is a function of the activity, context and culture in which it occurs. According to them, social interaction is the critical component of situated learning, and learning advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge. Students should form “Communities of Practice” in which they learn, work and solve problems collaboratively. Consequently, I think that teaching should encourage the formation of small teams and enable students to actively transform the content of the course into their own approaches. In so doing students learn to collaborate, become more open-minded and accept different points of view. With work places becoming more diverse, it is particularly important for students to overcome possible prejudices and to learn from the diversity of “voices”. Learning and knowledge acquisition takes place through the confrontation of diverse perspectives, and their partial integration into one’s own system of knowledge, values and beliefs. Universities and teachers have the task of facilitating this process through the offering of knowledge-sharing methodologies and role model behavior. In this context, learning is not a one-sided process but rather a dialogue through which both sides profit.

A further goal of education is to help students sift through the overload of data and information that surrounds them, develop student’s ability to evaluate data and contextualize information to transform it into knowledge. I think it is important for students to acquire new knowledge actively by discussing and by applying the learned knowledge to address problems. In order to facilitate this process, I believe that professors should behave more as team leaders than as teachers in the classical sense. Learning then becomes a process of organizing, structuring, motivating and problem-solving in which students are challenged to explore their limits, develop their creativity and facilitate critical thinking.