

## **Jugal K. Kalita**

### **Teaching Philosophy**

I consider myself a successful and satisfied teacher who is always striving to improve. I am a teacher because I have a passion for learning and want to make a difference in the lives of individuals who want to learn and improve themselves. My primary objective in teaching is to foster the development of reasoning, analytical and technical skills that can be transferred to various situations one encounters in life at work or outside. Another objective I have is to instill ideas of volunteerism and upstanding citizenship.

#### **Teaching Philosophy: Theory & Practice**

Teaching is an activity laden with personal values. The subjects I teach, the manner in which I teach them, the way I interact with students, and the goals I set for myself and my students each reflect my values, interests, and experiences. Since a teacher has academic freedom to decide what to teach and how, the methods I employ are an expression of myself. Thus, to be a good teacher, a good understanding of oneself is paramount.

The goal I set for my students is to make them think on their own, solve challenging problems and learn skills that are transferable to other areas. I want my students to achieve their best, which they may not recognize in themselves. This goal prompts me to be very demanding of my classes in terms of tests, creativity, homework assignments, and independent project performance. I believe learning is hard work that requires serious commitment and utmost focus on the part of the teacher as well as students. Thus, to me superior teaching involves pushing myself and my students relentlessly, but making sure that we maintain a pleasant, cooperative and intellectually invigorating learning environment that fosters creativity and affords needed flexibilities. I also believe that the path one pursues in achieving his goals is important. That is why I focus on the process as well as the results when I evaluate performance.

When students are engaged in learning, my responsibility is to lead by exposing them to new and exciting ideas, show appropriate approaches to problem solving, point them in the right direction if they go astray, and help them research and delve deeper if necessary. This I do without regards to time or location. I believe a good teacher is at times a good leader, and at times a good facilitator--especially when learning is self-driven or happens through interactions in informal learning communities. That is why I have an open-door policy for my students and am often available for consultation during weekends. I also facilitate the formation of formal and informal groups when necessary.

I believe in theoretical rigor but being pragmatic, also believe that college education should lead to a fruitful career with a good earning potential. That is why I strive to balance the coverage of theory and practice in my lectures. Theory lays the foundation for deep understanding of a topic, proficiency through practice makes students employable, and a good facility in both allow one to adapt and advance in his career and life.

I believe caring and sensitivity play important roles in facilitating learning, especially when the topics are complex and the tasks look daunting. I frequently walk through the laboratories to find if a

student needs assistance. I require my students to meet me in a conference after every home work assignment to demonstrate what they have learned and achieved and where they faced problems so I can assist them with resolution. Quite frequently, I let the students make the corrective steps we discuss in such conferences without grading penalties. I make it a point to know each student's name within a week or two of the semester. I make the students announce their names before they ask questions or make comments during the first few weeks of classes. This is to encourage the students to know one another better so that informal learning communities can form and flourish. This also imprints their names and faces indelibly in my mind. I greet each student with a smile or a wave of my hand when I see him or her outside the classroom. This is because I know when a student thinks the teacher cares enough to know him or her personally, it is difficult to let the teacher down. In addition, the student feels encouraged to come and discuss problems and issues with the teacher. I also advise the students on extra-curricular activities and projects to enhance the process of community building.

Teaching is part performance and part mentoring, backed by a depth of knowledge and intellectual curiosity. I am neither an actor nor a smooth talker. Therefore, I compensate by going to class prepared 200% every day. I want to impress my students so that they are enthused about topics that are frequently dry and difficult. I rarely consult my prepared notes during lectures. When I teach, I primarily use the blackboard or the whiteboard. I try to keep my board work meticulous because I think a good organization of thoughts finds its expression in a good organization of writing. When the teacher values organization, it rubs off on the students. I use overhead projectors sparingly and use computer demonstrations only when needed because they make the presentation of material flow faster than I like. I also want the students to appreciate clearly the logical sequence of steps in order to arrive at solutions to complex problems; if this takes time, so be it! I encourage my students to take notes and believe there is value to the mechanical process of following the teacher's handwriting on the board and copying those ideas into notebooks. I deliver my lectures in a clear, loud and precise voice. I take the roll in all my classes, undergraduate and graduate, to encourage regular attendance, because I have seen many a bright student not live up to her potential due to tardiness or repeated absences.

A teacher's success not only depends on his individual performance, but also the overall instructional success of the group or the department. Thus, I am flexible in the choice of topics I teach. Although I started out with specialization in the field of Artificial Intelligence, I have often taught other classes when the need has arisen in our department. Over the past ten years, I have taught sixteen different classes, from beginning undergraduate to advanced graduate level. This I do from a sense of duty, allegiance and pride. I believe it has made a contribution to the success of my department. Teaching new courses and courses outside my focal area requires a considerable investment of time and effort. But I am motivated by the desire to increase and diversify the breadth of my knowledge, to learn to be a more effective teacher in diverse situations, and to help my department achieve its goals.

I believe in pursuing research excellence in my chosen subfields of Artificial Intelligence and more recently Bioinformatics as well, because it brings me recognition in the academic community, and the respect of my students. I supervise a large number of graduate students in the pursuit of research. I also collaborate with scholars in several other institutions widely dispersed geographically.

## **Summary**

I am a teacher. I am also the product of the circumstances of my birth, intellectual development, and life experiences that have shaped my personality. I grew up in a house with reed walls, a thatched roof and a mud floor with no electricity. Whatever I have accomplished in life is by dint of family and societal encouragement and support, perseverance and focused diligence. Every bit of my growth and progress in life is reflected in my teaching philosophy---in theory as well as in practice. As an individual, I am friendly, low-key, unpretentious, considerate, empathic and open-minded. I have always excelled in understanding individuals of various backgrounds, fitting in (sometimes unobserved), and then being a motivator of thoughts and actions. These qualities form the fundamental basis for being a good teacher in a multi-cultural society like the US. I am always seeking self-growth so that I can be a better teacher and a better individual, as learning and learning to teach well are life-long processes.