

Leslie Hiatt

### Statement on Teaching

Affecting the lives of students by teaching them to learn how to acquire knowledge and how to achieve success is a primary motivator for seeking an academic career. My best teachers were those that required us to think, to look from various perspectives, and to enjoy the journey. These teachers expected more and required excellence instead of allowing us to slide by. Teaching has required me to learn to draw out my student's strengths and help them to overcome their weaknesses. In general chemistry lab, I had a few students realize too late that they wanted to change majors. I remember one student in particular who was failing the class and came to me not wanting to do the same in lab. After staying later with him and allowing him the extra time he needed, he began to act like he actually was enjoying the labs. He seemed less fearful and had a more positive attitude about chemistry as a whole. Students are so diverse and meeting their needs is hard at times, but working from various angles I hope to engage more than the simple cookie-cutter model that students sometimes try to become. I work hard to keep this in mind when structuring classes and developing relationships with students.

Learning new techniques that place the students in the role of teacher or leader is one way that might help students succeed. Verbalizing their understanding and working in collaborative environments has seemed to help students grasp concepts that might have been more difficult if approached alone. From the examples I have seen in the lab, the experiments that required work in teams and utilized the chalkboard for discussion purposes provided for the greatest growth in understanding. The students worked to bring each other up to similar levels instead of allowing one or two to remain confused. These kinds of techniques not only help the students learn but also allowed me to informally assess their comprehension and help identify new ways to introduce later labs.

The subject of chemistry has always appealed to me because it created an opportunity for me to feel competent while being just challenging enough to keep my interest. I feel teachers have the responsibility of helping students gain confidence that might otherwise be replaced with complacency. Students lose motivation when told either verbally or non-verbally that a subject is too hard. Working as a tutor with Youth Encouragement Services, I would see many students struggle with reading or with math. Those whose parents had told them these subjects were too hard would have the most difficulty. I had to use a variety of techniques to remove these mental road blocks and help the students feel the pride that comes with even the smallest amount of achievement. Varying the approach as tutoring progresses helps motivate students that might have otherwise struggled to see any reward.

Learning is fun when education is more than simple regurgitation. Education should challenge thinking and bring about growth. I enjoy watching students when they finally begin to understand and to become active participants in their own learning. Whether the understanding is seen in the construction of their reports or in the confidence they exhibit performing the labs, it is enjoyable to watch their fears of failure disappear and become

replaced with self-assurance. I want students to work hard and pay attention. When they do, I want to be there giving them every opportunity to succeed.

I am thankful for the unique perspective each student brings to the classroom. These perspectives require multiple approaches for learning as well as assessment. I am working on utilizing different learning strategies that not only help students learn, but which also help me discover how much they truly understand. Having students with distinct ways of expressing themselves makes this a challenge, but an enjoyable one. Learning about different forms of formative assessment has allowed me to implement it in the classroom. The information I gain from assessing the students in this manner helps me realize daily what I need to work harder on based upon their understanding. Different teaching strategies and assessment techniques are necessary, and are especially effective if implemented with the hope of seeing the understanding that could occur with a little encouragement.

Teaching in its simplest form is basically communication between two individuals. Without both sides listening and working to improve this art, the lines of communications can be broken. As a teacher, my students will come to me with various ability levels at which they will be able to communicate. I cannot control my student's level of communication when I first meet them, but I can control the way I communicate with my students. I am constantly working to improve this relationship with my classes, through collaborative learning, by presenting challenges that require thought, and by allowing multiple paths for success. My hope for my academic career is to be able to be the type of teacher that I would have remembered.