Teaching-Learning Philosophy

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To my current and future students,

As faculty, I am expected to articulate my teaching philosophy. Since you are the reason that I am here, I am choosing to address this to you. I anticipate that by sharing this information with you, you will better understand how and why I make the decisions that I do. This will enable all of us to be more successful in our efforts together.

I believe that collaborative partnerships among you, your fellow students, and me are the foundation for creating an effective learning environment. Like all successful relationships, ours must be built upon respect, trust, communication, hard work, and shared goals. We are all responsible for ensuring that these essential elements are present. I am the guide in the process of developing and ensuring an effective learning environment, but I cannot do this without the efforts of each of you. Central to each partnership is reciprocity. Specifically in our partnership, I am both the teacher and a student; you are both the student and a teacher. In fact, my philosophy is better termed a teaching-learning philosophy. One cannot occur without the other, and each of us will teach and learn.

I am certain that we share the goals of your success in the physical therapy program and to pass your national licensing exam. However, my goal is not simply that you meet minimal standards to practice safely, but that you are an agent of change in advancing our profession; that you not only have excellent clinical skills, but that you incorporate compassionate care, ethical practice, and service to our profession and our community; that you not only gain a good livelihood for yourself, but that you accept your responsibility for advocating for people who are sick, injured, or disabled; that you do not follow blindly, but lead in ways small or large inside and outside of our profession.

To meet these ends, as I plan and implement the content and delivery of my teaching, I seek to consistently intertwine several themes. In addition to evidence-based practice, my courses are informed by our profession’s core values: social responsibility, integrity, excellence, accountability, professional duty, compassion/caring, and altruism.

Realizing that I cannot teach you everything that you need for your professional practice, I focus on teaching you how to critically think, how to incorporate reflection in order to improve your learning and your practice, and how to most effectively find answers for the kinds of questions you will likely face. I integrate very practical lessons from my 24 years of clinical experience, and strive to give you context for your learning. I intend to model for you how to be a life-long learner and how to be fully engaged in our profession.
While there is a place for traditional lecture, I actively explore other strategies for teaching and learning including technology, group discussion, reflection activities, and experiential learning. I do this because you and your classmates likely have very different learning styles, and because evidence supports this multi-faceted approach. I require you to contribute towards teaching the courses because you have important input to share and because teaching is often the best way to learn. I also seek opportunities for you to learn from professionals outside of physical therapy because they have much to teach us and because interdisciplinary collaboration is best practice. I also expect you to work hard to develop excellent verbal and written communication skills as these are essential for a professional to possess. Like it or not, you will be judged on these skills outside of school so you need to develop them now.

In addition I want you to engage with the community beyond our classroom’s walls. I intend to incorporate local and global service-learning opportunities throughout my courses whenever appropriate. It is our professional responsibility to serve our communities, and our communities can teach us how to be better health care professionals. No matter what strategies we attempt, I want you to focus on learning from the process and embrace the uncertainties and possible discomfort that go with trying new things. Flexibility will be at the heart of our success.

Speaking of flexibility, I seek to have you examine your biases, and promote your commitment to cultural competency. I encourage you to embrace diversity in your classmates and your patients, and hope you will promote diversity in our profession. I want to challenge your assumptions, and broaden your perspectives.

I will guide you to learn about the practice of physical therapy locally and globally, and how our profession fits into the larger health care system inside and outside of our borders. I encourage you to consider the big picture, to be a global citizen, because it benefits you, our patients, and our local and global communities to understand the broad and complex forces that impact all of us.

I have high expectations of you, and want you to have high expectations of me. I believe that the more clearly I communicate with you and the more opportunities that I provide for you to participate in your own learning, the more successful we will all be. To this end, I attempt to create structure and organization in my courses while allowing you to choose topics and designs for projects as is practical.

As a graduate student and adult learner, you are responsible for actively participating in this partnership. I seek and expect your input. Just as we both need to evaluate your progress towards your successful learning during and at the end of each course, we both need to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching strategies as each course progresses.

Should you find this discussion all too heavy, know that I believe that fun and laughter have important roles in an effective learning environment. We can take our work seriously without taking ourselves too seriously.

If I am successful in all I seek to accomplish, you will understand that the philosophy of student-centered teaching can be applied to patient-centered practice. You will also accept that your professional duties extend beyond the clinic walls. Most importantly, the quality of our teaching-learning efforts and our professional practices will demonstrate our recognition of this fact:

Our ultimate shared responsibility is to our patients and society.