

## DAVID J SAAB: TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Creating a structured environment to facilitate learning through a project- or problem-based learning pedagogy rather than transferring knowledge characterizes my approach to teaching. Motivating students consists of opening avenues for confident participation and creativity rather than relying solely on the promise of a good grade. Listening is an essential skill that allows me to adapt the structural and motivational elements of my teaching to accommodate individual learning styles. I have developed this philosophy through years of practice and study. I am able to apply it in classroom, online and blended learning environments.

My first forays into the world of teaching were as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. As a resource for the community, I provided classes to adults on nutrition improvement, family planning, food and water sanitation, and community business management. I taught English in elementary school using a Total Physical Response approach, where experiential involvement, rather than rote memorization, was essential. I continued to work in the Marshall Islands as an intercultural liaison and trainer after my Peace Corps service ended. I worked for an American company on their process improvement program, which required me to translate its materials into a language and culture that was only semi-accommodating to the concepts involved. Company guidelines limited the ways I was able to deliver the training, but I was able to make it as interactive and culturally appropriate as possible, despite its lecture-oriented format. I worked closely with small teams, using and devising ways of applying process improvement techniques in ways that fit their work styles and work environments.

Because of my fluency in the Marshallese language and my deep familiarity with its culture, the Community Education department approached me to offer classes for both Americans and Marshallese. I developed and offered introductory, intermediary and advanced courses for Marshallese Language over a two-year period. Understanding language means understanding the speakers' experience of that language, so I naturally integrated cultural understanding as part of the course. I also incorporated interactivity and physical responsiveness in the language courses. Subsequently, Community Education solicited me to begin offering basic skills courses in computer literacy and word processing, which I taught in Marshallese. This latter experience, along with process improvement training, was key to my successful teaching experiences.

Later, in my master's program, I learned that interactivity was a key component in effective learning and developing intercultural training programs and materials for both international and domestic contexts. And though my master's degree was focused on developing training programs focused on interpersonal communication in intercultural contexts, I was able to take these lessons and apply them to the learning of technology as senior instructor for customized software. Despite my title of instructor, I became rather a facilitator of learning. I began to instinctively elicit learners' experiences using Socratic methods to facilitate their understanding of new information technologies and systems as part of their familiar business processes.

I am currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in the College of Information Sciences and Technology at The Pennsylvania State University, where I also received my doctoral degree. As a graduate student I had the opportunity to teach two courses. Ratings for my first course, *Information and Organizations*, were 5.59 out of 7 for *overall quality of the instructor* and 5.22 out of 7 for *overall quality of the course*. Ratings for the original course I developed and taught in Spring 2010, *Technology & Information Ethics*, were 6.00 out of 7 for *overall quality of the instructor* and 5.39 out of 7 for *overall quality of the course*. I find that a combination of guided experiences and reflective questioning, especially in online and blended learning environments, is effective in eliciting the critical thinking necessary for them to be successful in their

chosen path. Although they are younger, the diverse students in IST require just as much—if not more—flexibility on my part to accommodate their learning as those I have taught in community education and corporate training classrooms. As a postdoc, I will draw upon my own experiences with ethnographic research to teach a Qualitative Methods course in Spring 2012 to IST graduate students. I find the challenge of constantly adapting the learning materials and activities to meet the goals for the course to be stimulating and rewarding.

My teaching philosophy consists of: motivation, interaction, participation, hands-on work, thinking, and feedback. I outline the benefits and objectives of the course in the beginning of the semester and reiterate them throughout. More importantly, I frequently ask questions to my students when I teach; this interaction gives me feedback about the level of their understanding and allows me to guide their learning effectively. I provide opportunities to work on team projects and to make short presentations. I like when my students learn by thinking and researching a new problem. Students often need guidance beyond the basic academic course subject, and I enjoy mentoring them whenever I have the opportunity. The learning of technologies or cultures is a very interactive process in which the student should have a global view. At the same time, the student should be aware of the details that are so important to understanding the relationship between the focus of inquiry and the context in which it is situated to successfully implement envisioned solutions.

My teaching methods include using visual resources (such as animated slides, printed materials and short videos) to better illustrate core concepts and help the students actively engage and expand their understanding of them. I used a video of research on ant colonies, for example, to illustrate the concept of organizational structure, and videos of student proposals to stimulate discussion about the complexity of ethics in corporate environments. I like to design in-class activities such as team challenges or debates to strengthen the assimilation the core concepts. I frequently illustrate concepts with examples from personal experience and simulations of real-world problems.

I have found that classes wherein I was able to facilitate the connections between the core concepts and the learners' experiences have been valued highly by the learners. I believe that interdisciplinary projects can enhance the students learning, as they allow a variety of collaborative approaches and facilitate integration of concepts and ideas from many courses. I am particularly interested in bringing to class my own research and some of the state-of-the-art research in media technology and culture to motivate the students to learn, explore, and propose solutions to potential needs in societies. This problem-solving approach can help to prepare the students to take initiative, set their own plan, find information, and build solutions.

I would enjoy teaching courses in the areas of culture, ethics, new media, and in the philosophies of technology or information. Based on the experience and the knowledge built during the process of doing my dissertation and pursuing my research interests, I would also be interested in developing new courses in areas that support both the practice and the research of ontological integration, knowledge representation, semantic interoperability, intercultural communication, information ethics, and new media technologies.