

# Michael Wayne Totaro, Ph.D.

## Teaching Philosophy, Strategies, and Objectives

### **Philosophy**

My philosophy of teaching asserts that students who truly wish to learn and think for themselves deserve nothing less than my commitment as a teacher to help guide them actively in observation of phenomena and exposure to new ideas, assimilation and assessment, and critically reflect and respond to such phenomena and ideas. Practically speaking, this involves high expectations of myself and my students, as well as engaging and thoughtful encouragement to always explore and move forward. Moreover, I emphasize to my students the importance of learning from one another through collaboration and discussion, and not be afraid of making mistakes or going down a path that leads to a “dead-end” scenario. Finally, I daily remind students that learning is truly a lifelong habit of the mind; it does not end with the conferring of a degree, but in fact continues to happen in myriad ways and in a variety of circumstances throughout life.

### **Strategies**

I employ both: (1) a Socratic approach with my students, in order to facilitate self-exploration and discovery; and (2) a series of experiential activities, to help solidify students’ understanding about concepts and ideas. Of course, students are expected to read from the course textbook, as well as other sources, such as articles, scholarly papers, and practitioner reports. My lectures offer students discovery from varying vantage points, so that they can recognize how truly agile they can be in their exploration and unfolding of ideas. I leverage the use of assigning considerable amounts of very rigorous homework; in junior/senior courses, I require individual and group projects, so that students may learn to work effectively with others. Overall, I want my students to recognize for themselves the reality that practical problems are very rarely “nicely packaged.” As such, logic and critical thinking are essential to their ability to solve real problems.

### **Objectives**

In my view, students should expect always to explore, observe, assimilate, and assess ideas and phenomena. The desire to expand worldviews, as well as ask the “why” question, should become part and parcel of a student’s lifelong passion for continuous learning, both before and after graduation. Additionally, there should be a willingness to see from others’ points of view and differing interpretations of phenomena. In sum, my overriding objective with teaching is to guide students toward a realization that they are capable of accomplish much in their lives, given a certain amount of interest, time, and effort.