

**Statements of Teaching Philosophy  
by 2014 Recipients**



*William Arnold*  
*Seaver College*

*Kristine Knaplund*  
*School of Law*

*David Levy*  
*Graduate school of Education and Psychology*

*Gary Selby*  
*Seaver College*

*Cynthia Coburn*  
*Seaver College*

*Bernice Ledbetter*  
*Graziadio School of Business and Management*

*James Prieger*  
*School of Public Policy*

*William Arnold*  
*Assistant Visiting Professor of Business*  
*School of Business*

Thank you for the Howard A. White Award for teaching excellence. Throughout my career, I have taught at eight universities and can effectively teach eleven business courses. Most of my teaching experiences took place while being an executive of leading national health care systems and world-class academic medical centers. I am able to effectively bridge academic learning with practical experience, resulting in deeply applied, profound, business knowledge. I understand business fundamentals. The methodology of my teaching is to equip and thoughtfully prepare students to become distinctive business leaders reflecting faith, service, ethical character, and competence.

My clear purpose as a professor is to serve and unconditionally be a living, credible role model for equipping my students, both personally and professionally, for lives of success. My brand is to create and sustain the conditions within which myself and others can continually achieve personal and professional greatness. I am dedicated and live my brand as a servant leader.

### **Trust**

Caring for each student in a real, unconditional manner provides my context for continually earning trust. Students have my personal cell number to call me anytime, to assist with any issue. Students have access to my resume to assess the proven, measured results of my teaching, academic performance. Each student must know and see that I walk my talk. Several times a semester, each student gives me anonymous feedback on my performance and about what they further expect from me as their professor. I put myself on the line for being held accountable. I tell my students that I exist for their success and to tell me how my service can be continually improved. All students get a copy of all the comments and we openly track each one for accomplishment. Student expectations of me as a professor are equally important as my expectations of them. My students make me better. My students and I are challenged every day to live and learn outside our comfort zones, and to learn and experience new business skills. At the end of every class, I want each student to leave with valuable, practical application from the course.

### **Preparation**

I believe I am as effective as my last class. What I am doing today is more important than anything I did yesterday. What I am doing now is more important than what I have ever done. Course material is continually fresh and relevant, which is a byproduct of my disciplined study of global business. The agendas for every class and the next class are clearly posted. Each class is customized and designed from my practical and academic experience. Students receive stimulating articles in each class. I search out the best business articles because I believe each student deserves the best. I also identify learnings for students to supplement their customized, niche interests. My office hours are posted with extensive sign-up lists for any student to have easy access, who needs help with anything. I meet with students at their convenience, as well. Students who have graduated and are placed around the world connect with me regularly. Each student, upon graduation, gets my business card to call me anytime during their careers if they need anything. This includes reference letters for graduate schools and career decisions. My intense preparation is a result of being extremely organized and arriving in my classroom early. I listen carefully to my students and live with constant vigilance of serving their needs. I tell and show my students that I am always with them and they are never alone. The dignity of each student is the centerpiece of my purpose as a professor. I connect with each student through grace, caring, kindness, and being prepared with the right knowledge. I never turn a student away. I spend equal time with students on small as well as big issues. Everything that is important to them is also important to me as I serve and prepare.

### **Being Real/Relevant**

I must be real and human to my students. I tell my students to see me as a real person and a living example of our business learnings. I continually tell them stories and ethical dilemmas from my life and career so they have a real context for the learning. I focus a lot on ethics. I focus on the importance of living conditionally and unconditionally. I

believe my teaching must be effective so that each student feels, tastes and sees my purpose, passion, and infused energy for continually earning the opportunity every day for the honor to serve as their professor. Students see the high expectations that I have of myself so that I can give each one my best. Students should see the ethic of my character in action and the applied rigor of my critical thinking and disciplines of being prepared. I want and hope for students to recognize, assess, and eventually trust my character and competence as a leader. As a professor, my greatest competition is with myself, to constantly demonstrate through my behavior the values of George Pepperdine by freely giving back what I have received.

### **Closing**

I want to thank you again for the Howard A. White Award. My belief is that any fruit from my work is credited to a source outside myself.

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*Gary Selby*  
*Professor of Communication*  
*Seaver College*

In his essay, “Meditation in a Toolshed,” C. S. Lewis describes his experience of entering a shed that had a small hole in its roof, through which a beam of sunlight shone into the dark room.<sup>1</sup> He muses on the difference between the experience of viewing the beam of light from the outside and actually stepping into the beam—“looking along the beam”—so that the light now allows him to see and make sense of the world around him.

Lewis’s illustration captures my vision for teaching. For me, teaching involves far more than simply inviting students to gaze on facts and theories from the outside. Instead, my challenge is to guide them to the place where their knowledge enables them to understand and engage the world.

This vision is deeply rooted in what classical thinkers called *phronesis*, or “practical wisdom,” which they viewed as the ability to respond to one’s *kairos*—one’s “unique moment”—with discernment and grace. When our students leave us and go out into the world, they will be called upon to speak and act in situations that are often uncertain and complex, for which the range of options before them will not always be clear or obvious, and for which the outcome of any particular course of action will not be guaranteed. I want to help them develop the knowledge, virtue, and skill they will need in order to understand and respond creatively and ethically to those situations.

*What does this mean for me as a teacher?*

Of course, I want my students to master the material, whether that means being able explain the debate about rhetoric between Plato and the Sophists, to uncover the constellation of invasion metaphors that frame the public’s perception of immigration, or to know when to use a Pearson r or a t-test in a statistical analysis of research data. But more than that, I want them to internalize that theoretical knowledge in a way that broadens the set of “lenses” they can use to understand the problems and challenges they will face in their lives and work, and that provides them a rich store of resources that they can call upon for responding to those problems and challenges. I want them to develop intellectual abilities that transcend the particular areas of content in my courses—critical thinking and reflection, the ability to read and integrate challenging material, and a facility with expression, particularly, speaking and writing. Finally, I want my students to be engaged, self-aware, compassionate, and committed to making a positive difference in society. I want them to grow as persons, to live with a sense of wonder, to be able to go through life with their eyes open. In short, I want my students to leave my class not only as knowledgeable communication students or even as better thinkers and writers, but also, as wise citizens capable of acting effectively and responsibly in the world.

*What does this look like in the classroom?*

From the broadest perspective, this vision requires that I approach my classes by considering carefully the outcome I hope to achieve, asking, not “What do I have to cover?” but “What do I hope my students will remember and be able to do when they leave my class?” More importantly, I ask, “What kind of persons do I hope they will become as a result of our encounter?”

Within those particular courses, this vision also means that I seek to connect what I teach to “big ideas” rather than presenting students, in Parker Palmer’s words, with “armies of facts . . . march[ing] single file through a lecture laden with information.”<sup>2</sup> As an example of this, I might begin that first class of the semester not by distributing and “going over” the syllabus but rather, by engaging my students in a “What’s the BIG IDEA?” conversation, where we identify broader questions and issues that the course material itself will address as the semester unfolds.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Meditation in a Toolshed,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 212-15.

<sup>2</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 121.

Operating from this vision means that I seek to connect theoretical or representational knowledge to practical problems, using experiential learning activities and case studies to make that connection. As an example, each year in my “Communication and Leadership” course I typically devote a class session to the topic of compliance gaining strategies—the verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors that all leaders use to influence their followers (e.g., rewards, threats, appeals to group identity, etc.). In my early years of teaching, I would have typically “gone over” the strategies with my students in a class lecture, defining and explaining and perhaps giving an example of each. The students would dutifully write down the information from my lecture in their notes. At exam time, they would encounter questions asking them to identify or define the strategies, which would be my indication of whether or not they had “learned” the material.

Looking back on those early years, I realize that I was transmitting a body of abstract, theoretical knowledge to my students in a way that was ultimately of little value to them. They would come into my classroom with one or two “default” strategies in their “tool kit” (likely threats and rewards) and they would leave using the same two strategies, despite the fact that they could correctly identify or define all of them on the final exam. What they needed was for me to teach in such a way that this knowledge became integrated into their actual skill set. They needed to develop the ability to “read” the situations in which they would be called to lead and they needed an expanded range of responses that would allow them to interact with their followers in a way that was appropriate, effective, and virtuous. Only in this way would they leave my classroom having truly mastered the content of my course.

In order to achieve this goal, I might begin by inviting students to analyze a scenario of poor leadership based on an example from my own experience, which then creates the space where we can talk about the actual strategies that are available for addressing the situation. I might end the discussion by providing students with some kind of application experience—perhaps another case study or even a role-play—which allows them to actually “practice” the material and to make the real-world connections.

Finally, this vision demands that I be self-aware and intentional about my own presence and way of being with my students. If the goal is merely information transmission, then the identity of the teacher is largely irrelevant. But if the goal is forming persons of wisdom, then my own presence may well be the most important factor in reaching the goal. I need to be able to demonstrate wisdom and wholeness myself, to convey the sense of wonder and discovery in the way I approach my subject, to build trust with my students, and to model discipline and good work habits before them.

What most excites me about Christian education is that we who work in private Christian colleges and universities are perfectly poised to pursue this vision. We practice a blend of teaching and research, within settings that allow a level of flexibility that is not always found in larger, public institutions. What other institutions are rediscovering—that character, faith, and spirituality matter—we have always understood, and we have historically placed these qualities at the core of our mission. Most importantly, we do the work we do because we love students. Of course, we love our disciplines and our scholarship, but our calling is ultimately to nurture holistic transformation in the lives of young people, equipping them to see the world in a new way.

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Meditation in a Toolshed,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 212-15.

<sup>2</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 121.

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*Kristine Knaplund*  
*Professor of Law*  
*Pepperdine School of Law*

Howard A. White Award For Teaching Excellence, 2014

Thank you for selecting me for the Howard A. White Award. I appreciate the wonderful support I have received from my Dean, the law school administration, and all my colleagues in helping me be a better teacher. I chose to come to Pepperdine after eighteen years at UCLA because of the school's mission to serve students and to prepare them for lives of purpose, service and leadership, and my twelve years here have confirmed the wisdom of that move.

As a teacher, I see four primary goals in my dealings with my students. First, I help them to learn fundamental doctrines in my field. Second, I teach them to think like a lawyer, by critically analyzing rules, rationales, and policy judgments. Third, I encourage my students to think beyond what the law is to what it should be, and their role as a catalyst for change. Finally, I see myself as a role model for students, helping them to learn how one behaves ethically and morally in the world, balancing work, family, and spirituality. I encourage my students to develop their moral compasses, through class discussions, individual meetings, and my work with Phi Delta Phi, a student organization with an emphasis on legal ethics. In everything I do, I take to heart Ken McBain's words from *What The Best Teachers Do*: "You don't teach a class; you teach a student."

I am constantly striving to improve my teaching. I have organized seven national conferences on improving teaching in law schools, and have attended countless panels, presentations, and colloquia with colleagues from virtually every law school in the country. I administer my own evaluation form to my students, in addition to the school's forms, and read both sets of evaluations with great care. I meet with former students to ask for their comments on how the class can be improved. I encourage colleagues to attend my classes, and appreciate their feedback on the experience. I have also performed statistical analyses of whether my methods of teaching students how to learn are successful. My article with Richard Sander, *The Art And Science of Academic Support*, 45 *Journal of Legal Education* 157 (June 1995) found that students in my classes improved their grades, both over the short-term (1 semester) and over the long-term (2 years) at a statistically significant rate. I treat my students with the utmost respect and courtesy, and have the highest expectations for them. I call on students frequently, and keep track of those who appear to be struggling. I give them sample questions on a regular basis, and encourage them to turn in answers to me voluntarily by offering small prizes (lunch with me, for example) to the top scorer.

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*David Levy*  
*Professor of Psychology*  
*Graziadio School of Education and Psychology*

*The mediocre teacher tells.*  
*The good teacher explains.*  
*The superior teacher demonstrates.*  
*The great teacher inspires.*  
-William A. Ward

*I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think.*  
-Socrates

When I reflect on the truly special teachers throughout my life who have had the most profound impact on me, I realize how much they are still a vital part of who I am. From elementary school all the way through my doctoral program, my experiences with these teachers continue to resonate with me to this very day. Starting with Mrs. Sheldon, my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher at Andrew Bennett Elementary School in Inglewood, teachers have always been a powerful source of inspiration to me and have influenced not just my own teaching, but my world view as well. I want to be that kind of teacher to my students. I want to do for others what they did for me.

How do I attempt to accomplish this? As a start, I identified the characteristics they possessed that were so valuable to me. How were they similar? What did they all have in common?

- ♦ They clearly loved to teach.
- ♦ They cared about their students.
- ♦ They praised effort more than performance.
- ♦ They were structured and organized, but not rigid.
- ♦ They imparted both knowledge and wisdom.
- ♦ They role modeled clear thinking.
- ♦ They valued creativity and humor.
- ♦ And they all inspired curiosity.

I strive to emulate all of these virtues in my teaching philosophy. However, while identifying their commonalities serves as an essential foundation, it does not yield a fully comprehensive portrait. Clearly, teaching is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional endeavor. What other factors can be utilized to analyze their effectiveness, thereby contributing to a more well-rounded philosophy of teaching? Put simply: not only their similarities, but also their differences. Each teacher makes a unique contribution to the mosaic of every student's educational experience. I have, therefore, identified the attributes I believe that I possess, which embody my particular strengths as a teacher.

### Critical Thinking

Educators rightfully profess that critical thinking is perhaps the most vital component of learning – far more important than simply memorizing specific information or facts. Throughout our academic careers, we are continually bombarded with requests, pleas, challenges, demands, and even ultimatums to “think critically.” We are taught that critical thinking is essential to successful education. However, specific tools for critical thinking are rarely – if ever – provided to us. As a result, although we may become convinced of the value of critical thinking, we are left not knowing quite what to do about it.

This observation became the impetus for my professional passion for the pursuit of improving critical thinking skills, and resulted in the publication of my textbook, *Tools of Critical Thinking*. The book, which was over twenty-five years in the making, reflects a distillation and synthesis of my academic training in social psychology, my endeavors in conducting theoretical and empirical psychological research, my ventures in

clinical psychology, my experiences teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as my observations of life around and within me. The text consists of 30 specific critical thinking principles, or *metathoughts* (literally, “thoughts about thought”). These cognitive tools provide the user with specific strategies for inquiry and problem solving, and serve as potent antidotes to thinking that is frequently prone to be biased, rigid, simplistic, myopic, or lazy. Although they were conceived and written specifically for the field of psychology, they transcend the confines of any specific topic and can be utilized in virtually all areas of learning and practice.

I believe that my knowledge of, and emphasis on, critical thinking is perhaps my most valuable quality as a teacher. It is the key motif woven throughout the fabric all my courses, and is manifested not just in lectures and readings, but also in classroom activities, exercises, demonstrations, and written assignments. As I remind my students, unlike memorization of facts and knowledge, critical thinking is a skill that, once acquired, developed and practiced, becomes a robust and permanent component of one’s world view.

### Cross-Cultural Diversity

Another essential attribute of my teaching philosophy is my passion for preparing students for diverse populations. In this regard, I am co-author of *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Critical Thinking and Contemporary Applications*, the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of which was released in Fall, 2012. The book has become the #1 international best-selling text on the topic. In addition to American and European distributions, an Indian edition of the text was published in 2009 specifically for the South Asian market, for distribution in India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. A Chinese translation of the text was released in early 2013. The book was also translated into Bahasa Indonesia (the official language of Indonesia) and released for world-wide distribution in late 2013. Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation in the world. Of its large population, the number of people who fluently speak Indonesian is fast approaching 100%, thus making Indonesia one of the most widely spoken languages on earth. Thus, at this point, my co-author and I have foreign editions in India, China and Indonesia – the three biggest countries in Asia.

How does my dedication to preparing students for diverse populations translate into my teaching? First, I share the knowledge I gained in researching and writing *Cross-Cultural Psychology*. Second, I draw upon my own professional and personal experiences in working with diverse populations, discussing these candidly with students when appropriate. I stress the importance of attempting to strike a judicious balance between idiographic versus nomothetic approaches in working with individual clients. Last, I constantly strive to serve as a positive role model in my handling of classroom discussions related to issues of cultural diversity.

### Humor

I firmly believe that humor is one of God’s greatest gifts to the human race. It enables us to rise above the pain and suffering which life inevitably throws our way, it can provide new perspectives on the world around us, it is a vehicle for passing on knowledge and wisdom, it helps us to forge deeper connections with other people, it enables us to find existential meaning, and it generally makes our lives more joyful. In my teaching, I use humor to engage students, to illustrate didactic points, and simply to make the experience of learning more pleasurable and desirable. Here is one example:

A woman walks into a psychiatrist’s office complaining that she’s a zombie. The psychiatrist, trying his best to convince her otherwise, says, “You’re walking and talking, aren’t you?” “Zombies walk and talk,” replies the patient. “Well, you’re breathing, too.” “Yes, but zombies breathe.” “Okay, what *don’t* zombies do? Do they bleed?” “No, of course not,” says the patient dismissively. The doctor replies, “Okay. Then I’m going to stick this needle into your arm and we’ll see if your belief is right or wrong.” So, he plunges the needle deep into the woman’s flesh, and, sure enough, blood starts to pour out of the wound. The woman is aghast. In utter dismay, she turns to the psychiatrist and says, “My God, I was wrong...Zombies *do* bleed.”

I typically tell this story on the first day of class to illustrate one of the most common errors in critical

thinking – the “belief perseverance effect,” which refers to our tendency to cling to our beliefs, even in the face of clearly disconfirming evidence. Although there are many ways to teach this critical thinking principle, I have found over the years that this anecdote – and many others like it – frequently have more impact and staying power than nearly every other teaching method available. I also share a number of my published satirical pieces, which use humor as a means of shedding light on a wide range of very important topics. Some of these include: “A Proposed Category for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM): Pervasive Labeling Disorder,” “The Emperor’s Postmodern Clothes: A Brief Guide to Deconstructing Academically Fashionable Phrases for the Uninitiated,” “Psychometric Infallibility Realized: The One-Size-Fits-All Psychological Profile,” and “How to Be a Good Psychotherapy Patient.”

### Authenticity

When George Gershwin traveled to France in 1928 as a young, aspiring American composer, the famous French composer Maurice Ravel was said to have advised him: “Why be a second-rate Ravel, when you are a first-rate Gershwin?”

As I stress to my graduate psychology students, the most valuable resource they bring to the therapy session is themselves. Similarly, the most valuable resource a teacher brings to the classroom is him or herself. Of course, it is essential for teachers to impart information and knowledge in a professional manner. But being as authentic and genuine as possible is what makes them truly unique – and ultimately has the greatest impact. Just as the teachers who influenced me the most were true to who they were, I am committed to a life-long journey of self-discovery, and I strive to manifest that in my philosophy of teaching.

So, who am I as a teacher? Someone who values critical thinking, high-impact classroom interactions, experiential learning, humor, human connection, respect for cultural diversity, and the deep desire to inspire students. When I look through the years of student letters and feedback on course evaluations, they frequently cite my honesty and “genuineness” as being among my most valuable attributes.

### The Teacher-Student Interface

When I’m asked if someone is a “good therapist,” my most typical response is, “it depends on *for whom*.” Defining an effective therapist cannot be accurately accomplished outside of any specific interpersonal context. It depends mostly on the match between therapist and client. I believe this also holds true for a “good teacher.” Some teachers are a great fit for some types of students, while others – who might be equally knowledgeable – are not as good a fit. That, in essence, is one of the key challenges to me as a teacher: to find a way to match my attributes with the particular needs of students. This is, of course, constantly a trade-off, trying to balance teaching the class as a whole, while also attending to the learning and personality needs of individual students. Although I have no specific formula, I always strive to navigate through this delicate and ever-changing balancing act.

In summary, I love to teach and I believe that my excitement and passion are contagious in the classroom. And I like to think that Mrs. Sheldon from Andrew Bennett School would be proud of her student.

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