

Teaching Statement - Jesse Hoey

Statement of values Teaching takes work. The value of preparation cannot be underestimated.

A hard working teacher encourages hard work and develops a bond with the students.

Teaching requires honesty. An attempt to answer a question without knowing the answer never goes unnoticed, and lowers the teacher's credibility in many student's eyes. This credibility is crucial to the passing of information between teacher and student, and needs to be maintained with the greatest care.

A teacher must be dynamically positive. Encouragement for a student's answer which, though possibly incorrect, displays an interest and an effort, is an indispensable tool to stimulate the student to further thought and work. A dynamic teacher has the ability to make the classroom an enjoyable place to be, which can replace the difficult and frustrating goal of passing a course by the enjoyable path to knowledge.

Finally, a teacher should be open to the students, for they are full of fresh ideas and comments, which can be useful in honing teaching skills, learning new material, or in research.

Contributions to Teaching I steadily improved as a teaching assistant for the first five years of my doctoral degree. My student evaluations increased steadily as I honed my techniques and materials. I developed a website for additional practice material for the tutorial sessions of two courses. The website was a novel concept at the time that received good feedback from students, and has since become the standard for teaching assistants for the same courses. I was then an instructor for two terms. My first term left me feeling dissatisfied with my performance, which led me to modify my teaching style, resulting in a much more satisfactory experience in my second term as instructor.

The most difficult problem that I confronted as a teacher was the setting of midterms and final exams. In two summer classes, I designed 2 quizzes, 3 midterms and 2 final examinations. The task of setting an exam in computer science is made difficult by the necessity of making up novel questions to avoid overlap with previous years, or with generic questions found on the web or in other classes. The instructor must insure that these questions are fair, but challenging in the material of the class, without being overly challenging in the material of the problem. For example, many programming problems are to design a program to solve a particular math problem. The exam question must primarily challenge the student's programming skills without overly rewarding the student's math knowledge. In my first teaching experience, I had a tendency to make the exams too easy. Although many students were happy, I knew they were not being sufficiently challenged. In my second term as instructor, I over-corrected for both midterms. The result was a low class average, and many students feeling discouraged. I worked hard on the final examination in the summer 2002, and was successful. The exam was fair, but challenging, as evidenced both by the student's performance, and by their reports to me after the exam. This learning experience has taught me many of the skills necessary to set exams in computer science.

October, 2005