

# James M. Tyler

# Teaching Statement

Purdue University  
Department of Communication  
Interpersonal Division  
Beering Hall, 2266  
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2098

<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~tyler>  
E-mail: [tyler@purdue.edu](mailto:tyler@purdue.edu)  
Tel: 765-494-3313  
Fax: 765-496-1394

Teaching represents distinct moments in time in which an individual has the opportunity to inspire and empower another. It is my role and my goal as a teacher to increase these opportunities, not just wait for them to happen, by stimulating students to not only learn but to feel personally changed by their participation in a course I am teaching. Most students want to succeed, but often believe they cannot or simply don't know how. As a teacher I am passionate about finding the most effective ways to not simply impart information to students as if their minds were empty vessels waiting to be filled, but rather, to empower them to take responsibility for their own learning. To accomplish this goal, I need to help students develop a sense of engagement with the material and to perceive it as personally relevant.

I believe that the key to nurturing student engagement lies in a teacher's level of passion. Indeed, the very presence of passion sparks the inspiration to learn. But it demands on my part, a sense of compassion for students, not an emotional compassion but an intellectual one. In more practical terms, as a teacher it is important that I understand the material from a student's eye view. To do so, I have to imagine what it is to learn from their perspective, to know their educational vantage point, and often more importantly, to know that I do not always explain material in the most clear and precise manner – that I can always improve. And learning how students directly experience my class helps me accomplish this by providing me with information to refine and clarify my presentation, thus making it more accessible, clear and relevant.

The key to accessing students' perspective is to listen. This requires an environment in which students feel free to express questions and ideas without fear of being academically judged. I believe that creating this kind of environment fosters respect, and subsequently increases student's depth of understanding and commitment. Setting this type of stage encourages students to become engaged in the learning process and in essence, helps pave a most difficult road – the road in which students self-create the desire to become educated. However, to develop this kind of situation demands a concentrated effort on my part and can only materialize if I show students an honest willingness to listen. To do so, I strive to maintain a classroom forum conducive to learning that encourages open dialogue and sustains ongoing student feedback regarding the structure and presentation of material.

A professor once told me that it was difficult to teach statistics to students because professors often forget which aspects of the material are hard to understand. That comment resonated with me and I realized that it is imperative to determine which part of the material is especially difficult for students to comprehend. This may sound like an obvious and simple task, but I believe it requires a great deal of time and conscious effort. But the rewards are great, because if I can hold that vision in my mind and prepare my presentation to meet that vision, then I am providing students with a less stressful starting point – one at which they can begin to comprehend material instead of being frustrated by it.

Personal interaction with my students is one of the most important aspects of my teaching and is crucial to developing a good rapport. To increase familiarity I try to learn each student's name and I actively encourage dialogue during office hours, and I schedule numerous one-on-one appointments to go over especially difficult subject matter. I also find that communicating with students through email is invaluable – I frequently send students email reminders, updates, and various attachments. In fact, across the six statistics courses that I have taught during my graduate program, I would list the ability to effectively communicate with students as one of my strongest assets. Actively demonstrating to students that I am available helps them overcome their initial insecurity to seek help. This is especially important in a Statistics course, which requires many students to grapple with their basic fear of anything that has to do with math. I also strive to improve my teaching by seeking student feedback, and talking with peers and more experienced teachers, as well as experimenting with different teaching methods. Through these evaluative and informative processes I continually attempt to refine and improve my course material and teaching practices.

Teaching is a privileged position that demands humility as much as mutual respect. It is crucial that teachers recognize the power inherent in their role and are self-reflective about their actions. In my teaching I work to be mindful of my position as a role model of the kind of learning I strive to promote among students. Learning is a reciprocal endeavor – informative, educational, and uplifting for teachers and students alike. I know that I have been successful in my teaching when students ask questions and openly raise issues that they do not yet fully comprehend and more importantly, do so with an enthusiastic desire to deepen and broaden their understanding.