

Lindsay J. DePalma

I study what it means for professionals to love their work in the context of today's precarious economy, and I have spent the last several years teaching, including two courses of my own. As a result, I have many thoughts about the role of the university in preparing its students for the "real world." At the intersection of my ideological commitment to foster intellectual thought and my pragmatic commitment to prepare students for a job I perceive two goals: 1) teaching students how to learn and 2) encouraging students to see themselves as dynamic and capable thinkers. As they become global citizens in a flexible new economy, I want my students to see themselves as competent, adaptable humans with multiple interests. In my evaluations students consistently report that my courses are challenging, but 100% of them recommend me as an instructor. I have a lot to learn, but their positive feedback encourages me that I am on a professional trajectory that will be a great asset to this university and the students we serve.

I hope to achieve my goals with a teaching philosophy characterized by **intentionality** and **investment** and a teaching strategy of **active learning** through which students actively participate in the educational process. This means that I am invested in the intellectual growth and success of my students and that I intend every aspect of my course to serve a pedagogical purpose. The purpose of active learning is that students feel ownership over their learning and connection to the course content. One way I garner ownership is through providing choices. For example, I have had students choose their presentation topics or news articles for reflection pieces, and for my economic sociology course called "Economy and Society" I gave them 6 Planet Money podcast episodes to choose from to analyze in their final paper. Especially when I give students the opportunity to apply course content to material that they find interesting the expectations that I set are high—as is my responsibility to equip my students to meet them. As one of my students commented about my Qualitative Methods course, "[Field Methods] is hard, but I got through it with professor DePalma." Another, reported, "Overall we really had to work hard in order to succeed in the class...[but] I learned a lot and I really enjoyed the research I had to do. I learned a lot about my self and how hard carrying out research is."

By being intentional in my class design and in demonstrating my investment in their education I show my students that I take their education seriously, and I tell them that I hope they do, too. Beyond the classroom, I want students to be able to contextualize their experiences in the broader institutions that shape them and to synthesize, interpret, and be critical of the depth of information and knowledge available to their fingertips. One way I help students connect course content to their broader social worlds is through using current events or personal experience. For example, I used pictures and stories from Powerball Bonanza—as it was called—to analyze the lottery from the conflict and order perspectives, I had students bring in election propaganda from their mailboxes to discuss social construction, and we learned about deviance through the Patriots' well-publicized Super Bowl "deflate-gate." For more difficult concepts I rely on the theories of education which recommend starting with a familiar concept as a way to help scaffold understanding of a new concept. For example, in 'Economy and Society' we discussed the performance of gender at length before making the leap to economic performativity. In the same course we discussed the phenomenon of student debt—intimately familiar to many of them—before delving into the causes of the 2008 economic crisis.

I try not to lecture for more than 15 minutes before engaging the class with a Clicker question, media clip, free-write, or group activity such as a think-pair-share or jigsaw. I also continually ask for feedback and collect formal data two times per quarter, which helps me learn which lesson plans or activities were effective. After observing my class, an award-winning educator and colleague writes, "It was clear... that every moment in the class is carefully timed and well- thought in order to make the most of the class period and keep the students' attention. I appreciated how much forward thought and planning went into Lindsay's

class, and I think it is clear that her students do to.” One student reports, “Lindsay combines the perfect amount of lecture/discussion time. Class flows smoothly and encourages retention of information.” Another comments, “[Economy and Society] can get confusing at times, but if you have someone like Lindsay teaching it, it really helps the learning process.” Furthermore, my assignments are designed for iterative learning that accommodates feedback and growth. Every assignment helps build skills necessary for the exams. As my students say, “The papers we had written prior to finals were a great way to help students analyze for the upcoming final” and “[the short papers] were helpful to stay on top of our work and our research. I believe these...really helped for the presentation...and the final paper.”

Another way I make an intentional effort to invest in student success is by encouraging students to be engaged in class. I am a huge advocate of communication; on my end this means clearly communicating content and expectations, on their end this means asking questions, following up for clarification, and attempting answers. Confusion and failure are actively welcomed in my classroom as part of the learning process. I tell my students that by definition learning is working through content that you don't yet understand and that I personally always have questions as I learn. One way I help students engage with the material is by having them participate. For example, poll questions enable students to report and defend answers, and jigsaws allow students to gain expertise in a small group before teaching their peers in new groups comprised of individuals who mastered different content in the first group. I've found that a particularly popular activity is taking students outside to practice ethnographic observation, followed by comparing field-notes with a partner to analyze how positionality can shape data. Rather than being told, students were able to see it. One student testifies, “Professor DePalma was an incredible professor. All of her lectures and power points were very helpful. She gave great feedback on papers and she was there to answer any question. She worked hard providing us with things we needed to do well in the class. She was always making sure that the students understood what was happening and what she was asking of us. She was very clear.”

Though my investment in student learning means that I that I care about their academic success, I also convey that I see them as whole humans and care about their general success, too. The rapport I build makes them more comfortable to participate in class, and to divulge personal struggles that are interfering with coursework. Students refer to me as “always available,” “easy to talk to,” “always very helpful,” and an “amazing professor [who] clearly shows compassion and diligence towards helping her students.” In office hours students have shared various struggles including immigration status, family pressures, mental illness, and abusive relationships. When I was a student I lost my stepmom to a long and agonizing battle with melanoma. I often tell my students this to encourage them that I know that there is life outside my classroom, and that sometimes life makes coursework difficult. In most cases I am able to work with the student to get them back on track, but in all cases students thank me for caring, and opening lines for communication. As a teaching mentor summarized, “it is clear that Lindsay is approachable and cares about the students' experiences in her class; so while she has authority she is not authoritative.” On the first day of class I tell my students that it is my sincere goal that the course changes them. I believe in the power of the college classroom to fundamentally affect a student's life because it changed the trajectory of mine. Though few will end up pursuing a graduate degree like I did, I measure my success as an educator by the things my students take with them as they leave my classroom. I want them to have more confidence in their competence, and have a more critical sociological perspective of their world and their roles in it.