

Cinzia Sevignani, Ph.D. Biologist

Teaching Philosophy

I believe in teaching as a mission with the objective of making students learn the content of each course, but also with the goal of developing life-long learning skills and critical thinking. These are very important qualities, which will prepare students for both their future professions and as human beings involved in the progress of our society.

In today's world teachers can no longer be only dispensers of knowledge. They should be sensitive to the needs and interests of students and to the demands of the work market. Teachers should communicate effectively, not only with students, but also with other faculty members, sharing their experiences with the goal of continuously improving their teaching. Knowledge and skills are important, as are other qualities such as being an adviser, an encourager, a stimulator, a mentor, a resource, a researcher and a patient person. I believe that these are some of the necessary qualities needed to become an outstanding educator, which implies that not every expert in their field of research is an excellent teacher.

I try to meet my students' needs regardless of their previous knowledge, background and learning abilities. Furthermore, I tailor the materials to the needs of each student in my private tutoring. I have meet and help students to overcome difficulties in class by using a variety of techniques and teaching styles. I receive new ideas from students' feedback and comments, the more I teach the more I learn. It is a lifelong process. In each of my classes, my goal is to share my knowledge and to pass it to my students keeping in mind that a good teacher should also inspire them in their future professions and in their everyday lives as young adults ready to make their contribution to the future of our society.

Most important, teaching materials should be presented in a variety of ways, to the greatest extent possible, in order to make the knowledge more accessible to all students. The three principles of [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#), which borrowed the term of universal design from architects and designers, illustrate how important it is to present class materials in multiple ways to promote engagement at different levels and to tap into learners' interests in an appropriate manner. This will motivate students to learn and ultimately to become self-learners.

The learning process in adults can be made more effective, if new material is related to previous background knowledge and/or there is a personal attachment or life experience that can be related to the abstract concepts of a lecture. A small percentage of students are motivated no matter what and they would do anything to become a "Doctor"; for the majority of the students there are additional ways to improve motivation and to open doors to other possible professions in life, previously not thought of. For example, one of my Anatomy & Physiology students decided to become an acupuncturist rather than a lab technologist following my lecture on the respiratory system. It was enough to ask the students to become aware of their breath and to try a couple of simple breathing techniques to change the class environment from boring/passive to engaged/interested. My approach helped the students to consciously be aware of the most important system in

human physiology and at the same time to see the act of breathing with new eyes or how it can be related to the whole body. Later, my student was grateful for my practical approach in that particular lecture that opened a new door in her mind. Currently, she is very happy doing a job that she really loves.

Introducing new concepts and/or skills is a complex task and students need to use a range of cognitive skills in order to remember the new information. Visual images, modeling, drawings and videos can be used to facilitate retrieval of information from previous classes and/or learning experiences. It is important to provide a way to visualize and form associations regarding what students are learning in class. Visual teaching tools can help in the long-term memory consolidation process. I tried a new visual approach in my Biology labs. The goal was to help students to retrieve part of their prior knowledge and/or to be able to relate the new information with real life experience.

I often use questions to introduce different topics and for the educational videos that students are supposed to see, sometime before or after classes, depending on the course level. I believe that questions are one of the best tools that can be used to stimulate curiosity, especially if we can relate them to a real life experience and not only to abstract concepts. In this way, words, formulas and theories will be supported by facts that will lead to a “deeper internal” learning that hopefully will be retained after the “traditional grading methods”/exams are over!