Teaching Statement

David Devecsery

For as long as I can remember, I’ve been passionate about teaching and fascinated by the process of learning. My first job in high-school was as a tutor in math, where I discovered how wonderful it is to watch someone finally grasp a complex topic and to see challenging problems suddenly become tractable to them. I’m excited for the opportunity to continue to see students learn and grow under my tutelage.

I believe that a good teacher enables learning, and that the actual act of learning is a process internal to the student, not something a teacher can force. This belief motivates my approach to teaching, guides how I interact with students, and structures my teaching. I believe it isn’t a teacher’s job to push a student down the path that leads to understanding an algorithm, but to light the path and encourage the student to walk it for his or herself.

I also strongly value diversity in my teaching, both from myself and from my students. I often find that some of my greatest ideas and breakthroughs come when I approach a problem differently from how myself and others have approached the problem in the past. I consequently believe it is vital to foster a learning environment conducive to all types of backgrounds and learning styles. When teaching I actively attempt to break problems down in different ways, provide examples, analogies, visual representations, and use class involvement to help ensure all styles of learning are welcomed and included in my lessons.

My teaching generally falls into two categories: advising graduate students, and teaching courses. I will now discuss my beliefs, experiences, and qualifications in those areas in more detail.

Advising Graduate Students

Over my graduate school career I’ve had the fortune of working as an informal student advisory role with several incoming graduate students, as well as some talented undergraduate students working with my group. I’ve also held research advisory roles with graduate students not in my group, but following up on my research. I find that working in a mentorship, one-on-one scenario, particularly with a graduate student, is a more customized experience. I cannot treat all graduate students the same, and I have to adapt my style of explanation or questioning to match their strengths and weaknesses. When teaching in general, but particularly when doing research with another student, I believe that I need to foster an environment of exploration among colleagues. We are working together to reach a goal, and we are both going to contribute things the other cannot toward our goal, neither of us should be worried about judgement for our misunderstandings or lack of background knowledge.
Teaching Courses

I’ve had the opportunity to teach two courses over my graduate school career, introduction to operating systems, and computer architecture (both senior-level courses). While teaching these courses my responsibilities included holding discussion sections, lectures, office hours, and helping to design exams. I have a broad background, and am qualified to teach senior-level courses in computer architecture and embedded systems; and undergraduate and graduate-level courses in operating/software systems and distributed systems.

When teaching a course, I believe in the old saying “If you give a man a fish, he’ll eat for a day, if you teach a man to fish, he’ll eat for life”. I could teach a student a sorting algorithm by telling them how it works, but I highly prefer guiding a student down the path that leads to them discovering that algorithm, so that in the future they can solve similar problems of their own accord.

I believe that, in a classroom setting, boredom prohibits learning, so when I teach I attempt to keep things as exciting and engaging for my students as possible. I’m typically a reserved person, but in the classroom I often adopt a quirky and energetic approach to teaching, I make quips and jokes, laugh at my mistakes, ask questions of the students, make them raise their hands and move around, and try to keep explanations and examples constantly evolving. In summary, when I teach a course, I try to keep my behaviors from becoming repetitive and vanilla.

Finally, I believe in making all students feel welcome in my classroom, and I attempt to make all students feel as welcome and involved in the course as possible.

In summary, I believe that my job as a teacher is to guide students through the process of learning, and that I cannot force knowledge upon them. I believe in creating an inclusive environment that uses creative techniques to help students who learn in different ways, and to maximize student involvement/minimize student boredom. Finally, I believe that students should be respected. They are on a journey of growth that may lead them to one day be my peer, and I think that seeing that growth may be the ultimate reward of teaching.