

Statement of Teaching Philosophy:

You Can Connect

(Joyfully)

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Introduction

Four Areas of Philosophy

Three of the four fundamental areas of my teaching philosophy are captured by each of the first three words in the title phrase for this submission: 1) “you”, 2) “can”, and 3) “connect”. The fourth area of my teaching philosophy evolves through a post-quarantine climate of remote synchronous learning and is best captured by the parenthetical term: 4) “joyfully”.

1. You

This week, a current student named Naila (class of 2027) reached out to me with the following email. Her timing was so striking, I solicited her permission to include an excerpt here with her name.

Dear Professor Yaverbaum,

I hope you’re doing well!

I know it's a bit early into the semester, but I was wondering if you would be willing to write my letter of recommendation for the FOS BS/MS program here at JJAY. Despite it being a few weeks into the semester, I truly believe that I’ve been able to learn so much from your Physics 204 class, and have had a lot of opportunities to showcase my capabilities as a student. I would be honored if you would consider writing my letter on my behalf. . . Thank you for your time and consideration! I really appreciate your support.

Here’s me choosing my “cosine” :-) (Emphasis & Quotes Added)

Best,
Naila

“Here’s me choosing my ‘*cosine*’”. Naila’s sign-off delighted me as much as it might have confused you, the reader. To see what she meant, please stay with me and read on...

The calculus-based physics classes at John Jay center on problem-solving. The problem-solving skills are tethered to a pursuit we explicitly emphasize and call

“Knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do” (see website navigation bar and find link for *Curricular Exhibit I. What To Do*). The ultimate lesson after two semesters worth of problem-solving is that there are concrete ideas we can try when we believe we “have no idea”.

The first is to quietly recognize that when we assert that we “have no idea”, it is probable that we mean something else. Most likely, we do have an idea—or quite possibly two. It’s just that privately, we think that at least one of our ideas is wrong. We find the choice overwhelming. We stop. As it turns out, we might well be right about being wrong. We are just wrong to think it’s so wrong to be wrong. We have a right to be wrong. We might even have a responsibility. We would do well to realize that this scary internal juncture represents the very time to keep going: when we do not yet think that we are where we need to be.

How might this approach to quantitative problem-solving relate to the world view of a John Jay as she chooses the next step along her academic path? What, in particular, could she mean by “choosing a *cosine*”? Look around and get a feel for the various curricular exhibits as you wish. Eventually, come back and join us for the next area of this philosophy statement. In *Section 2* of this *Statement of Teaching Philosophy*, we take a closer look at Naila’s metaphor...