

John Bagnato, Ph.D.
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

In recent semesters, my teaching responsibilities at several universities have included individual guitar lessons, directing small ensembles, lecturing for large survey courses, and teaching online. My students included both undergraduate and graduate students, music majors, and other majors from across the university. To be an effective teacher in this range of contexts requires the ability to construct and maintain consistent instructional methods and student expectations for each setting. Preparation, adaptability, and structure are central tenets of my teaching philosophy that produce positive outcomes for most of my students in these settings.

In the instruction of traditional music practices, a thorough command of the content is merely a starting point in preparation for teaching. I consider my students when preparing the language and modalities to convey content to them by asking myself, “How will they hear this lesson, and how can I make this inspiring and accessible to them?” I focus on each student’s learning style, skill level, and personality. I often communicate with the student in developing specific plans, timelines, and goals for them. Listening, practice, and performance are three essential elements of traditional music study. Students need to be immersed in music to develop and Lafayette is an ideal environment for them to thrive.

I adapt my goals to settings to engage and make the content accessible to the greatest number of students. Adaptability to a range of settings depends largely on my ability to engage students, even when lecturing to large international groups from diverse backgrounds and varied musical experiences. To accommodate this, coursework needs to allow students to insert themselves. Creating short writing assignments that foster this positioning and analysis has proven successful with students during courses. Assigning students to create exercises for their practice routine and practice journals ensures students accountability. Reinforcing this reflection in students builds connections that will increase the likelihood that they will maintain their interest and continue their learning beyond the course. Students thrive when they can contextualize themselves within the course material and reflect on their learning experiences.

Self-assessment in teaching and learning is vital for growth and development and is fundamental to my teaching philosophy. It applies to the way I structure my courses to facilitate students in their synthesis of course content. It also applies to developing and refining my teaching processes. My experiences in teaching continuously inform me and allow me to evaluate and assess my teaching techniques. To enrich my teaching techniques, I study resources like articles from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* section on teaching and learning to learn skills to implement. The last aspect of my teaching philosophy relates to one of the articles I encountered in the Chronicle and has become central to how I structure my classes (see Goobler, David. “Your Students Learn by Doing, Not by Listening.” May 1, 2018).

As Goobler’s title states, “Your Students Learn by Doing, Not by Listening,” and I have learned that students thrive when they are active in the classroom. I structure class activities that

develop students' abilities to participate in and contribute to discussions. One activity that I began using in medium-size History of Jazz classes requires and maintains student involvement and allows me to dialog with small groups of students. After I introduce the material to students, they break into small groups to prepare a short presentation for their classmates on a specific point (which I provide) from the material. I direct them in conducting a short period of research using the text and the online university library system. This is followed by a brief group discussion of their findings and the organization of their presentation. After returning to the full class environment, each group member presents an individual slide from the group's slideshow. I assess students on their contribution to the presentation for their participation grade.

Students benefit from the group activity previously described—participating in collaborative group discussion, economizing time for productivity in a group format, developing a concise, clear presentation, and effective oral presentation techniques. Actively preparing and articulating course material to their peers, even in a brief presentation, is useful for students' comprehension and is effective in many contexts. In addition to the content that they reinforce and contextualize while creating these in-class presentations, the outcomes accomplish what I believe is the ultimate purpose of the teacher. This includes developing students' interpersonal, problem-solving, and time management skills that they will utilize in numerous contexts throughout their lives. In the activities previously described, my students develop the ability to teach themselves through research and critical thinking, skills ideal for the academy, and other techniques for scenarios they will encounter in professional lives in and outside of academia.