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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

For me, the first step toward becoming an effective teacher, oddly enough, means thinking like a student. It means remembering what it's like to sit in that chair, whether in a darkened lecture hall or an intimate seminar room, and be, as it were, at the instructor's mercy for the next hour or three. It means better appreciating, from the student's view, how important is the instructor's role in leading students down the path of learning—in providing cues that spark discussion, questions that develop critical thinking, and opportunities for the self-teaching that is most meaningful of all.

That image of the student hungry for good teaching is particularly vivid for me, as I have experienced life from both sides of the lectern during the past year as a doctoral student and an instructor of record. I've gained new awareness of the need for good teaching, and of the challenge of actually delivering it. Now in my third semester teaching Writing for Online Publication—a course that covers “future of journalism” topics such as social media and news entrepreneurship—I find myself continually refining my lesson plans, not only because the material is ever changing but also because I sincerely believe there must be another, better way to energize and engage my students, to simply get them *excited* about the future of our field and the part they have to play in it.

My guiding philosophy on teaching is that learning takes place when students are excited, and that as instructors we can do much to draw out such motivation. I believe this is true regardless of the subject matter; nothing we teach is so boring that a good teacher can't make it interesting. Getting students “excited” is more than pep talks—it's a way of thinking. It's important because it shifts the paradigm, from one-way instruction to multi-way learning: Students no longer come to class as passive receptacles waiting to be “filled” by a lecturing professor, but instead arrive as active agents ready to work *with* the teacher and *with* each other to construct meaning. More importantly, the learning extends beyond the classroom and even beyond the curriculum, as truly engaged students become motivated to teach themselves, creating a virtuous cycle of lifelong learning.

With this goal in mind, I try to be an excitable professor. I bring high energy and passion. I use a mix of discussions and demonstrations, readings and videos, to match the different learning styles of my students. I create an environment for ambient learning outside the classroom by engaging students online, often by sharing links and thought questions through our class blog (writingforonline.wordpress.com) or via Twitter (twitter.com/sethclewis). I also like to engage students offline through one-on-one meetings that allow us jointly to assess their progress and strategize for the future. Indeed, while I'm ever concerned with the collective learning in class, I try never to lose sight of the individual, knowing that mentoring—perhaps the thing students need most in college—takes time, patience, and personalized attention.

Thus far, as one of the only Ph.D. students working as an instructor of record in the School of Journalism, I can claim a measure of teaching effectiveness. My most recent teaching evaluations—an overall instructor rating of 4.9 out of 5 and a course rating of 4.8 out of 5—were among the best in the department. Moreover, my course's new focus on innovation and business models for news has attracted attention from leading media thinkers such as Jeff Jarvis, who recently told his 27,000 followers via Twitter, “I wish I could take Seth Lewis' Future of Journalism class” (see <http://twitter.com/jeffjarvis/status/4103510647>).

Beyond that single course experience, I bring a devotion to basic teaching principles that apply to all subjects: *Think like a student. Make the subject interesting. Help students learn how to teach themselves.* Perhaps most of all, the best teachers remain good students themselves: They continue learning and polishing their craft, they refine their research agenda and connect it to their teaching, and they build out their ability to make the classroom a truly exciting place to be.