

# TEACHING NARRATIVE

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In nearly six years at the University of Minnesota, I have taught a variety of courses and types of students: Introduction to Mass Communication (Jour 1001), with up to 190 pre-majors and non-majors; Digital Media Issues and Theories (Jour 8003), a graduate research seminar; Internet & Global Society (Jour 3552), an undergraduate context course; Convergence Journalism (Jour 3102), an upper-level skills course; and an honors section of the Jour 1001 introductory course. Most noteworthy of late, I developed a new course at the intersection of communication, media, and video games—a large but highly interactive class called Digital Games, Sims and Apps: Storytelling, Play and Commerce. Building the course in 2014 required me to adapt both to a new field (games studies) and a new learning environment: a configuration that puts the professor in the middle, in a facilitator role, and the students around circular tables designed for group work and discussion. This experience has challenged and inspired me as an instructor, and reaffirmed my focus on active-learning strategies.

While different courses require different approaches, I bring to all of my teaching a set of core values: engagement, participation, and collaboration as the watchwords of effective teaching and learning. In particular, I have three primary goals:

1. *To bring passion to all that I do as a teacher*, such that students may develop a similar passion for the subject at hand and for lifelong learning in general;
2. *To make active learning the cornerstone of my teaching*, such that students may have ample opportunities to clarify, question, and apply new knowledge;
3. *To measure, evaluate, and modify my teaching*, such that students may expect instruction that is consistent with current research and practice, and is continually improved based on peer feedback and self-reflection.

This three-part emphasis—on passion, active learning, and assessment—is critical to my overarching philosophy about teaching as well as my class-to-class practicalities of instruction.

Regarding my first objective, learning takes place when students are engaged—indeed, *excited*—and I believe that instructors can do much to draw out such motivation. Getting students “excited” is a way of thinking holistically about the learning process and the student’s active role in it. It’s about shifting the paradigm from one-way instruction to multi-way learning: Students no longer come to class waiting to be “filled” by a lecturing professor, but instead arrive ready to work with the teacher and with each other to construct meaning. In this way, excitement for learning can extend beyond the classroom and curriculum, as engaged students become motivated to teach themselves, beginning a virtuous circle of lifelong learning. With this in mind, I bring high energy and passion to all that I teach. I use a mix of discussions and demonstrations, readings and videos, illustrations and hands-on activities to match the diverse learning styles and backgrounds of my students. I create an environment for ambient learning outside the classroom by pointing students to additional material online. I engage students in face-to-face meetings that allow us to assess their progress. While I am ever concerned with the collective learning in class, I try never to lose sight of the individual, knowing that mentoring—perhaps what students most need in college—takes time, patience, and personalized attention.

On my latter two goals—active learning and ongoing assessment—I have taken part in

many professional development programs led by the University's Center for Teaching and Learning. Because of these programs, active-learning strategies such as "think-pair-share" and "jigsaw readings" are prominent features in my classes; hardly a class session goes by without students engaging in some form of writing and sharing. Where I have replaced lecture time with more active forms of participation, such as in-class video clips paired with discussion, students have responded very positively, often coming up to me after class to ask how they can learn more. With regard to assessment, these teaching programs have taught me how to evaluate my work and make it better: e.g., how to prepare efficiently, teach with greater clarity, encourage students to think more critically, and manage common classroom problems. Additionally, regular peer evaluations from faculty colleagues have helped me improve my teaching.

The effectiveness of my teaching is evident in my student ratings, which are consistently above departmental averages, as well as in qualitative feedback expressed by students. During the 2014-2015 tenure process, the School solicited letters from former students to assess my teaching. One student wrote, "Seth Lewis is the type of professor that makes me proud to say that I graduated from the U of M, and he is the type of professor I hope my children will have."

In our graduate program, I enjoy mentoring students, formally and informally, and each year I take on new advisees. In 2015, I have assumed five new advisees (three Ph.D. students and two M.A. students), in addition to my role as committee member for seven other graduate students. My first Ph.D. advisee, Rodrigo Zamith, defended his dissertation in Spring 2015 and now holds a tenure-track position at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

In all, I look forward to developing as a teacher—learning alongside my students—for many years to come.