

Teaching Philosophy: Compassionate instruction cultivates compassionate students.

I walked up to my mirror on a Friday morning, stood tall and elongated my spine, curled my fingers to form fists and placed them on my hips. “I am compassionate, capable, and can achieve anything I set my mind to,” I said out loud to my reflection as I held my superhero pose. This stance, held for even one minute, is said to increase confidence, lower stress levels, and elevate self-esteem — all of which I could use on my first day teaching in person as a primary instructor. I stepped back from the mirror, took a deep breath, and made my way to campus where I would officially become “Professor Vasquez” to five advertising undergraduate students. Little did I know that this quick affirmation would lead to epitomizing the way in which I approach teaching.

Human beings are inherently social, observational creatures. We learn through watching others and are influenced by those around us. I believe that we are who we surround ourselves with, and because of this I aim to bring compassion and understanding to every one of my courses. Cultivating a supportive atmosphere where students comfortably share diverse thoughts, perspectives, and experiences is important — not only for enhancing course content, but also student’s understanding of the skills and lessons to be carried on once they walk across the graduation stage to become citizens of the world. Students enact what they learn in the classroom throughout their lives. Therefore, I aim to encourage all who I instruct to lead first with compassion, and how better to do this than exemplify that myself.

As an instructor, I am mindful that each person who walks into the classroom has unique life experiences that create dynamic and ever-fluctuating teaching conditions. Because of this, I promote an open learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves in their own distinctive way. It is my sincere hope that students under my instruction feel supported and aware that I not only serve as their teacher but as a mentor as well. I diligently offer practical opportunities to expand their professional networks through expansive guest lectures and experiential learning events. As I work to better myself, I also work to better my students through deep introspection and critical thinking.

I have had the privilege to teach a broad spectrum of coursework during my time at the University of Florida. In 2017, I started co-facilitating a spirituality and creativity in healthcare course through the college of nursing’s center for spirituality and health. This fall appointment continues to this day where Dr. Mary Rockwood-Lane and I construct a holistic and highly personalized academic experience for our students aiming to incorporate creative practices in their careers. Within the college of journalism and communications, I have been instructor of record for three courses, including public relations ethics and professional responsibility, STEM research methods (a research immersion course), and health communication that attracts students from all four departments in the college. With each class, I have adjusted my teaching practices to best serve the students enrolled to enhance their experience each semester. Since starting my teaching journey, I have found immense joy and passion in playing even a small role in my students’ lives knowing I have imparted valuable skills they will continue to carry with them. Each time I step into the classroom, I think of my superhero pose and aim to reach for the stars and compassionately show up for those who show up for me.