

My courses in linguistics and cognitive science have specific educational goals that are spelled out in the course syllabi available from my teaching page. These goals are integrated with my department's expected learning outcomes and the larger educational goals of the university. I see my role in teaching as a motivator that inspires students to achieve these goals by creating engaging learning environments, and also as a support person responsible for removing obstacles to learning and understanding.

Equal access, sensitivity to learning styles, and engaged learning

Given the multicultural society we live in, I know my classroom is made up of students with very different educational experiences and expectations. My lectures and in-class activities are created with the objective of reaching all my students. I find the best way to do this is to explore a problem from multiple angles, either illustrating it with many kinds of data or probing it with different methods. I also directly monitor student progress by assigning frequent assignments and trying to anticipate problems from students with different learning styles. I find that by providing an inclusive and sufficiently rich learning environment, students are able to engage more deeply with the course content than otherwise. I also work hard to protect the psychological safety of my students, because learning is harder without the trust that comes with this safety, and it also supports more cross-talk and understanding of complex phenomena from multiple points of view.

High-impact practices

Much of my teaching employs high-impact practices, like writing-intensive coursework, project-based learning, learning communities that link coursework to extra-curricular projects, and undergraduate research opportunities. Considerable research has shown that these practices enable students to integrate and transfer information more effectively, and they are excellent ways of supporting underserved students, like nontraditional students. High-impact practices like project-based learning and undergraduate research also allow students to connect their learning with future workplace preparation. Many of these practices also support the development of 21st century skills, like working in teams, quantitative methods, and communication skills. In sum, I endeavor to include high-impact teaching practices in all of my classes because they provide students with a better way to learn.

Student-centered approach

I see myself less as a lecturer handing down knowledge to blank slate students, and more as a guide who removes obstacles to learning and facilitates student success. Of course, every investigation has prerequisite tools and concepts, like phonetic symbols, and they must be laid out clearly. However, my teaching focuses on empowering students to use these tools to develop creative analyses, rather than asking students to commit them to memory. I have found that giving students clear expectations and the responsibility for creating their own analyses is a far better way for them to reach educational goals. This student-centered approach is especially important in teaching experimental linguistics and field methods, which require detailed analytical reasoning and intellectual independence from the student.

“Dr. Alderete’s class is not just about linguistics, it’s about learning how to think.”

I am always pleased to read in my evaluations (above) that students feel that they are reaching more general educational goals. Most of my students will not go on to be professional linguists. Therefore, while my classes have a clear linguistics focus, I want my students to walk away with more general analytical skills. For example, I hope students will have learned how to organize a data set and extract patterns from it. I hope that they will learn how to identify problems of scientific importance and pursue clear hypotheses about them. Problem-solving, analytical reasoning, and cogent writing are important goals in all my classes, as well as quantitative reasoning and numeracy.