

M. Sc. Jasper Colin Fessmann

Teaching Portfolio



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I. Teaching philosophy

I see my teaching as the quest to have my students learn and retain as much relevant content and methods (both for their further studies and personal development) as they can in the time given. I see building a relationship of mutual respect and communal learning essential. I can help the students with my experience to learn and be prepared for the challenges they will face in their chosen profession, at the same time I myself learn something new in each class I teach, either about teaching or on the topic itself if students ask insightful questions that I myself have to further research be able to tell them the next time we meet. Teaching a subject is a great way of further learning about it yourself.

Students should derive long-term benefits from their time in my classes by developing a passion for the course topics, as well as gaining as many insights for their further studies and scientific career as possible. I also aim to foster career-long habits of self-motivated learning.

Furthermore, I try hard to foster my student's research/scientific development by helping them to develop their own problem solving techniques, while providing them with the necessary methods and techniques. I do this in particular by allowing them to come up with their own feasible solutions and helping them to explore these to their logical conclusions.

I also put a great emphasis on practical relevance and applicability of the content I teach, in part perhaps because much of my earlier teaching was done for professionals in the business sector, who demand this above all else.

II. Teaching guidelines

I emphasize in my classes active and interactive learning, as well as taking an interdisciplinary and holistic approach. I care deeply to create a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect, where the students accept my authority in the role as teacher and expert while at the same time see me as approachable with their problems.

I strongly believe in transparency both in expectations and grading. Thus, in a deliberately serious, no-nonsense fashion I make expectations, grading and attendance policies very clear in the first lecture. At the same time I strongly spell out exactly how they can do well in the class and emphasize how much they can learn by taking the class. Having thus laid out the groundwork and showing both learning rewards and challenges, sometimes a student decides to switch classes, hoping for an easier class with someone else. As regrettable this is, in my experience the remaining students work harder and thus tend to do well, making it worth the loss. For example, all of my Mexican students passed my classes (even though some had to use every extra credit opportunities offered to do so) and almost all had perfect class attendance even in a cosmopolitan city with a great nightlife such as Berlin with classes starting at 7.00 a.m. and lasting for up to seven lecture hours a day.

Having established my authority as teacher and expert in the beginning also allows me to later be fairly accommodating and approachable for the students with their problems, without losing my authority. It also allows me to confidently deal with mistakes I might have made (by simply correcting myself and move on) or deal with questions that I do not know the answers to. I actually enjoy and encourage such questions, since doing the necessary research to get back to the question with an adequate answer by the next lecture is a great way to further improve my own understanding of the issue, as well as that of the students.

III. Teaching experience

Over the years I have thought in a variety of settings about different topics, from university classrooms, conferences, tour busses to in-house seminars for managers.

I will be teaching PUR 3801 “Public Relations Strategy”, a required public relations class at the junior level at University of Florida in Spring and Summer (A) of 2015 as instructor of record. My class syllabus can be found on the homepage of the University of Florida. I have served as Dr. Juan-Carlos Molleda’s teaching assistant for the PUR 3801 “Public Relations Strategy” class in Fall of 2014. In this, I taught two class sessions (3 hours each) by myself and co-taught two class sessions with Lisa A. Malone, director of public affairs at the *NASA Kennedy Space*.

In 2014, I have given professionals seminar and coaching workshops at the *Sächsisches Kommunales Studieninstitut Dresden* (SKSD) in Germany, a main provider of further education and certification for state employees of the federated state of Saxony:

- “Media Training” : One day seminar for governmental administrators and staffers on dealing with the press. One participant was the veteran press officer of the municipal works service of Dresden (capital city of Saxony).
- “Does a major’s office require a Facebook page? Strategic use of new media”: One day seminar in with majors and senior staff members of major’s office across Saxony.
- “Crisis Management”: A two hour workshop as part of the “major’s weekend retreat”, a yearly invitation-only meeting of senior majors from across the state of Saxony
- “Intercultural Negotiations” & “Crisis Management & Intercultural Communication”: 90 minutes presentations & workshops as part of the “open house” for regular participants of the SKSD

A constant throughout my teaching however has been my interest in international and intercultural aspects. So, it is perhaps also no surprise that I now teach in the U.S. and have been teaching internationally for two years at the Berlin Institute of Technology (TU Berlin) in an exchange program with the Mexican Tecnológico de Monterrey. I taught and co-taught the following course:

- Globalization - Working in the global business environment
- International Negotiations
- International Logistics and Distribution Channels
- Public Relations as Part of Integrated Marketing (co-taught course)
- Intercultural Communications (co-taught course)

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Such courses usually consists of 48 lectures hours, space out over a period of four weeks (two classes of 3 to 3 1/2 hour per class each day starting a 7a.m.). Class size varies between 10-15 students.

I have been a guest-speaker at Boston University, University of Florida and Georgia Southern University. November 2011, I gave a networking workshop for the Young Scientist Special Interest Group of the European Federation of Food Science and Technology (EFFoST) at the annual worldwide EFFoST Meeting. I gave a seminar on the "Impact of Globalization on Employability" at Stellenbosch University in South Africa on a DAAD grant.

I have also worked in Residence Life both at Boston University and Georgia Southern University for a number of years, training and teaching my staff as well giving student workshops. Being for a time responsible for the second-largest non-military dormitory in the US (Boston University's Warren Towers, 1800 Students) I also earned a great deal of experience in dealing with student issues (from academic problems to serious medical issues and criminal behavior).

In my student times, as Pledge Master and Scholarship Chair of the Georgia Epsilon chapter of Phi Delta Theta Fraternity I have taught prospective members in study groups to help them to improve their academics and their "Greek" knowledge. I have also been active in similar ways in the Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity.

IV. Didactic methods employed

I construct my classes according to the "Sandwich Principle". Thus, between the "bread" of introduction and the lectures ending, I try hard to alternate phases of "the meat" of passively taking in information with the "dressing and salad" of active interaction and application.

A typical lecture block starts with an attention grabber of some kind (picture, cartoon, rhetorical question, outlandish claim etc.) to get everybody's attention. I then spend five minutes on review of the last lecture as well as a short overview of what I want to achieve in that day.

Afterwards I alternate twenty minute PowerPoint presentations with ten minute intervals of exercises and some time for questions. In this I try hard to make the PowerPoint presentation as interesting as I can, underscoring the content with many pictures and graphs as well as lighten the mood every once in a while with quote or appropriate joke such as the "Official European Joke". I also draw heavily on personal experiences or relevant historical anecdotes to give context and credibility to my slides.

I end the lecture, after some time for student questions, with a five minute review of what we have covered in that lecture, a short preview of the next lecture, as well as dealing with administrative matters and assignments.

I use various didactical methods such as the flash light questions, one-point questioners, short student presentations as well as exercises and group discussions. In exercises I often do role-play, where I split students up in various interest groups

(such as representatives of the IWF, governmental officials that wants IWF loans and anti-project activists) and let them discuss and decide the issue themselves to better understand otherwise seemingly dry topics.

For the near future I am planning to try out several new didactic methods that I have learned in the Mass Communication Teaching class of Dr. Julie E. Dodd) at University of Florida and in the scientific continuing education program at TU Berlin's Centre for Scientific Continuing Education and Cooperation (ZEWK) such as the partner interviews, mind map, murmur groups, as well as various flash card and white board techniques.

V. Responses and evaluations

I actively look for feedback and constructive criticism from students, friends and colleagues. I also strive to get continuous feedback during my classes from my students verbally and through class room assessment techniques such as one-minute papers. If possible, I try to then adjust my emphasis accordingly, tailoring the class to the specific set of students, in the same way as I do this with business professionals.

My evaluation as a Teaching Assistant of Dr. Juan-Carlos Molleda (PR Department Chair at University of Florida) in the core PUR 3801 "Public Relations Strategy" class has been excellent both in presenting knowledge and inspiring critical thinking in the students.

As a professional lecturer and coach to public officials and senior administrators of the German state of Saxony have been good to excellent and my courses have been highly recommended to be taken by others:

„Media Training“: Rated 1,5 (A-), 100% recommended to others. Positive: Broad knowledge of media landscape, provided very good background information on the topic. Negative: Used too many English terms.

Does a major's office require a Facebook page? Strategic use of new media“: Rated 2,5 (B-), 80% recommended to others. Positive: Questions were directly answered, practical relevance, good communication, easily understandable even for "layman". Negative: Not enough emphasis on the communal problems, not enough time for individual problems. *Note: This was perhaps the hardest lecture I ever gave. All participants were highly suspicious about social media in general and had been send to the seminar by their superiors against their will. Thus, the initial attitude was highly hostile, but I was able to turn it around and made it relevant to them.*

Even though I would really like to have detailed evaluations of my classes in the exchange program, Tec de Monterrey unfortunately insists on conducting these themselves and did not provide us with detailed, quantified data. However, I have been told that my classes were overall rated "good" to "very good"; that most students found them rewarding and helpful. Several students have expressed, "that they wished, there would be more classes like Mr. Fessmann's at university". Many of them keep in touch, even though I cannot attend the various events that they invite me to in Mexico. Two of the students asked me to write them a reference for applying to programs.

The overall success of my students on tests also tends to strengthen my conviction that in the main I am achieving my teaching goals in creating interest, insight and proficiency in the course topics. Class grades hereby tend to be spaced out nicely along a bell curve, with a concentration on the very top end (with max scores) and small concentration around the C. In spite of the difficulty, all of my students so far have passed the classes, even though some needed to use every extra credit opportunity that I offered. I attribute this to making expectations so clear in the beginning and then working hard with the students that need extra attention to help them succeed without lowering my standards.

VI. Perspectives for improving my teaching

The key to improve as a teacher is always striving to do so. Good teachers are lifelong learners themselves first. Thus, I constantly strive to improve my lectures, document if something did not work out as planned and to make sure that every class I teach is a little bit better than a similar one I taught before. I have been further encouraged to do so by the inspiration provided by the Mass Communication Teaching class I attended at University of Florida and the excellent books “MyKeachie’s Teaching Tips” and Ken Bain’s “What the best College Teachers do”. I also had the great fortune to closely observe and be inspired by Dr. Juan-Carlo Molleda, from whom I learned a great deal about teaching in PR.

While at University of Florida I participated in the following teaching Workshops:

- TA Workshop
- Introduction to Canvas: Course management for distance education courses
- Using streaming media & videoconferencing w/ your course
- Advanced PowerPoint - multimedia for digital presentations
- Teaching/Assisting with an online course - Part 1
- Teaching Portfolio

While working at TU Berlin, I had actively worked on improving my teaching skills and achieved the qualifying certificate in „Higher Education Didactics – teaching und learning“ from the Centre for Scientific Continuing Education and Cooperation (ZEWK). In this program aimed at improving teaching excellence in associate professors and research fellows, I have successfully completed the following courses:

- Teaching for university’s best (60 hours)
- Planning and designing teaching and learning processes
- Traditional media in teaching and learning
- Competence-oriented assessment, grading and examination
- Gender in teaching and learning
- Intercultural aspects of teaching and learning
- Intercultural communication and negotiation strategies – Arabia
- Presentation techniques
- Moderation in teaching and learning
- Workshop: teaching portfolio – concept and teaching philosophy

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I also have improved my research background within TU Berlin's ZEWK program and have been awarded a certificate in "Research Management", taking the following courses:

- Knowledge management II: Uses of search engines and data bases for researchers
- Project management for university scientific staff
- Good academic practices and problem areas (such as plagiarism)
- Networks: the basis of successful research
- Writing professional project applications (grants)
- Fundraising at universities: Organizational development, marketing or money raising?

As the number of courses attended in the last years alone attest to, I have always immensely enjoyed improve my teaching and knowledge any way I can. This is even true while driving and doing menial work: I like to improve my teaching by listening to the various audio "Great Courses" of the "Teaching Company". These recordings are full length university courses (mostly consisting of 30-80 individual lectures of thirty minutes) on a wide range of topics by award winning university professors. Thus, over the last ten years, I have listened to well over a hundred university level courses mainly in history, philosophy, religions and science. Besides the interesting contents, I find these helpful in increasing my interdisciplinary perspective, providing me with historical anecdotes, as well as occasionally picking up some good teaching techniques.