

Teaching Philosophy

My approach to teaching has been shaped and influenced by a series of mentors I have been fortunate enough to work with over the course of my training and career. Although each of these mentors came from very different backgrounds, they all had attributes in common; passion for education, patience, and the ability to directly engage students.

It is my belief that students learn best when fully engaged; to achieve this essential connection with the students, I use a number of approaches. The first step towards this engagement, and the most important in my opinion, is attitude. I bring my excitement and a genuine love of immunology to the classroom. Even after more than 15 years of teaching; this passion continues to grow, and I am excited to share this enthusiasm with others. In recent years, the concept of immunology and infectious disease has emerged within mainstream culture, further propelling this passion. People genuinely want to learn how the immune system works and this further amplifies my enthusiasm for teaching. In my experience, this commitment is recognized by students and is contagious.

Second, I strive to be approachable and accessible to the students. This accessibility may involve my office door always being open (not only to the students in my class but to all trainees) or casual pre- and post-lecture question and answer sessions. Although this has perhaps become more challenging in recent years with the need for online instruction, I continue to make my availability to student a priority. I believe that more learning is achieved outside of the lecture proper and, as such, this student contact time is critical. This approach is perhaps best exemplified by my introduction of open-door tutorials into the lecture schedule of MDSC 321. These drop-in sessions, scheduled before each exam, allowed the students to raise questions that were not covered in class and have been very well received. It is also important to recognize that individual student's needs and learning styles vary. The benefit of this one-on-one student time is that it allows for the customization of instruction styles or content in a fashion that is not possible when lecturing to the class as a whole. Teaching is often less effective when directed to the class as single entity and is far more impactful when delivered to the student as an individual learner – a lesson I learned early in my training and one I try and keep central in my approach to instruction.

Third, I strive to keep the material presented in my lectures current and applicable. This is particularly important for highly dynamic fields of study, such as immunology, where new advancements are made daily. Through the inclusion of primary research sourced both from recent high-profile publications and from my own research I aim to demonstrate how the theories and mechanisms covered in the textbook apply to actual research. Additionally bringing topics from the real-world (media, health policy) into the classroom places topics in perspective. Using this approach, I can better reinforce the learning objectives covered in the lecture; this, in-turn, allows me to describe these principles in real-world context.

Finally, I believe that it is essential to involve students in immunology and not simply lecture at them. Demonstrating that immunology is a component of their everyday lives, whether it be a viral outbreak covered on the evening news or the food they eat, enforces that it is not just a theoretical science and immerses the student in their education. We embrace that knowledge is a tool that allows each student to be empowered to advance their own understanding of the world around them. Further student involvement is achieved through interactive class assignments including small group work and reports. It is critical to allow the students to help direct the focus of these studies. When students are given latitude, under appropriate mentorship, these class assignments can be used to foster the study of a topic of personal interest to the student. This involvement, in-turn, leads to the student asking more questions, which then further engages them in their studies, and ultimately reinforces the learning objectives. Most importantly, this approach also teaches the student how to critically evaluate material, a skill that extends far beyond the specifics of any given lecture or course.