

Community and Experimentation

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When I design a course, it is centered on the *student experience*. The content, by and large, is a vehicle *not* a destination. I try to focus on content that I can get excited about as I have found that my enthusiasm can be contagious.

Every class I teach is different. It is more jazz than symphony. Going with that analogy, the students are part of the jazz ensemble, and I work to get them playing as soon as possible.

To make this happen, I start by articulating clearly what are the goals of the course and what is expected of them to reach those goals.

Thereafter, I work to create a *community of learners* to reach those goals. And I put myself in that community! So, I am neither the “sage on the stage” nor the “guide on the side”, but am one of the learners (just more experienced).

I make this clear by intertwining “freestyle teaching” with well-prepared lectures. I encourage questions and sometimes stop my planned lecture to explore their inquiries in depth. I work to get the students at the board working problems and giving inclusive presentations.

I do not believe anyone understands anything unless they can explain it to someone else. So, I try to put my students in situations where they explain their ideas. The sooner they take this role, the sooner they will start to think of themselves as the “expert” which will be paired with them acting the part.



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