

## Jonathan Perry-Houts Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Writing a teaching philosophy can be tricky. The expectations for what one ought to include are rarely explicitly defined, and everyone seems to interpret the task slightly differently. Most people seem to use it, to some degree, to tout how well-intentioned they are about fostering a positive learning experience for students with whom they interact. Frequently, that expands into more of a resume, with a list of preferred teaching strategies or anecdotes about past teaching and learning experiences.

Of course, none of that really demonstrates the way someone approaches teaching in a general sense, and how their ideas extrapolate to unforeseen future challenges is often unclear. I intend for this statement of teaching philosophy to communicate the underlying principles behind my approach to teaching. Those principles are independent of specific methods, but focus instead on a commitment to adherence with up to date, evidence-based pedagogy. In a phrase, this philosophy represents what I would consider a truly student-centered approach to teaching and learning.

Although frequently used interchangeably, I would argue that “student-centered learning” is not synonymous with “active learning.” Student-centered learning refers generally to teaching that adapts to student needs, rather than requiring students adapt to the teaching. Active learning describes a set of techniques that has shown to be highly effective at helping students learn. Active learning promotes retention of course content, and engages students in a way that’s more likely to foster development of higher order cognitive skills than traditional lecture alone. That distinction makes active learning a good example of student-centered pedagogy. However, use of in-class activities does not constitute a substantive philosophy about teaching. Techniques like flipped classes, think-pair-shares, and interactive class activities are considered best practices, but not because new methods are somehow inherently better.

The past decade has seen rapid advances in STEM education, and increased interest in understanding the way people learn and develop as a means to that end. We have new tools that help us improve student outcomes, optimize our use of class time, and promote equity and inclusion in the way classes are structured and facilitated. These advances have largely resulted from the education community’s focus on evidence-based pedagogy, the sort of meta-meta-cognitive study of how students experience their education, and what we as educators can do to improve that experience.

While I don’t intend to be on the front lines of education research, I believe that keeping up to date on advances in the field is important for all educators. I therefore strive to always make my pedagogical choices as deliberate as possible, and adopt or abandon teaching methods based on available evidence over both tradition and current trends. My teaching methods have and will change over time, but my teaching philosophy is based on the stable concept of student-centered learning through adherence to evidence-based pedagogy.