

Statement of Philosophy

Professor/Rabbi Arthur Gross-Schaefer, JD, CPA (inactive), MAHL, Loyola Marymount University, Co-Chair department of Marketing and Business Law, Los Angeles, California

Teaching: a Sacred Journey

I initially came to Loyola Marymount intending to stay only one year. I had been accepted to rabbinic school and delayed my admission to the program while I ran a congressional campaign. I planned to teach the one year to have the experience of working with college students and then move on to becoming a rabbi. I had no intention of making teaching my vocation. Nonetheless, I got hooked and I have been associated with LMU for the past twenty years.

I remember becoming fascinated by the creative process of trying to help students master a particular subject. However, I quickly realized that the classroom interaction was dealing with much more than a mere conveyance of information. Students were unfolding, growing, questioning, and developing their human potential. The education process was interacting, modifying, and changing how the student perceived the world and his or her place in that world. In effect, my role as a law or an accounting professor was directly involved in each student's sacred pilgrimage through life. And, it didn't take long for the realization to dawn that I was being changed by this interaction. My development as a human being was being altered by the exchange of ideas with students. I saw teaching as a sacred act which transforms both student and teacher. This realization forms the bedrock for my teaching philosophy.

I view students as fellow pilgrims along life's journey. Certainly, I offer experience, training, and knowledge. In addition, I have also developed skills that facilitate learning. At the same time, my philosophy directs and dictates viewing students with a great deal of respect. I see each student as having some knowledge or experience that will inform and touch me if I take the time to listen and learn. Accordingly, I view students as teachers who are deserving of my esteem.

However, many students arrive believing that they have little to offer. They have been worn down and conclude that education consists of taking down what the professor says, so that they can properly regurgitate the information on the exam. A primary goal of my teaching is to help students open up to the importance of their own acquired wisdom. I want them to appreciate that each of them is a unique creation with his or her own set of experiences and views. I encourage students to share their knowledge. In a very real way, I believe that a professor has to restrict and resist the temptation to overly control and overly teach so that there is space for student expression. Rather than fill them with pre-selected knowledge, I prefer to provide an environment of mutual respect and trust in which students learn from themselves, each other, and from the teacher. Ultimately, I want students to love learning, to develop a curiosity about life, and to appreciate their unique role in the world.

It is clear to me, that much of my teaching philosophy comes from the Bible. Like many children, I remember learning how Moses "looked, and, behold the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." Everyone taught me that the miracle was that the fire did not destroy the bush. Yet, I always wondered how Moses knew that the bush was not being consumed. Moses had to be willing to turn away from what he was doing, to approach the spectacle, to examine what he was seeing and finally to understand what was happening. Only after he did all these acts of investigation was he able to hear the divine voice. Perhaps many others shepherds had seen the fire but had walked past without realizing the mystery that they could have beheld. I try to encourage students to be willing to 'turn aside,' to take time, to investigate the wonder of life. When teaching business law or for that matter accounting, I use the teaching of the subject matter, in addition to increasing the student's knowledge, also as a gateway for self understanding and development.

The burning bush story also brings me another significant insight which informs my outlook. Moses asks how he should refer to God. The normal translation of God's answer is "I am that I am." For me, however, I read the Hebrew of this text as "I am in the process of becoming who I am." If God is in the process of unfolding then so are all of us. Who we are at any given moment is only a temporary point along our individual journey. My role as teacher is to assist my students in their continual process of becoming.

Based on the above, I have developed a number of personal perspectives that help me to implement my philosophy of involving deep respect for my students:

1. I view each student as a messenger who has something important to teach me
2. I view each student as a potential colleague and friend
3. I view each student as in the process of growing and being of infinite value
4. I believe that a student learns better by helping to arrive at their own understanding rather than simply adopting my views
5. I may learn more from my students than I teach them
6. That I must be careful how I interact for I teach through my actions more than I teach through my words
7. I humbly acknowledge that much of my reputation will be dependent on how well my students perform as caring human beings and competent professionals

My twenty years at LMU have been joyful. I may have come to LMU on a whim, but I have stayed because of the realization that I love teaching at LMU. I live in Santa Barbara and it is truly a pain to drive down to Los Angeles. Yet, I continue to make the long trek because LMU has allowed me to focus on students. Certainly academic achievements are stressed, but never over teaching. Moreover, the Jesuit-Marymount tradition of uncovering the unique gifts in each individual has provided the foundation

upon which my teaching philosophy has been built. It has and continues to be an honor to be a professor at LMU. Perhaps my personal philosophy can best be stated with this quote that I often share with students:

One learns a great deal from one's teachers

One learns more from one's colleagues

One learns the most from one's students