

# Robert D. Winsor

## **My “Teaching Philosophy”**

In developing a package of material to be reviewed for consideration of the President’s Fritz B. Burns Teaching award, each nominee is asked to describe his or her teaching philosophy. I have a great deal of trouble with this. Basically, I don’t believe in teaching philosophies. More precisely, I believe that every individual that has devoted his or her life to teaching possesses a well-reasoned and serviceable teaching philosophy. That individual teaching philosophy is very important for personal, psychological reasons, but I don’t believe that philosophy is what differentiates a good teacher from a poor teacher.

In my time at LMU, I have personally witnessed the varied instruction methods of a great number of phenomenal teachers, and I have heard students rave about many others. In fact, I owe these instructors a significant debt, as I have stolen many of their ideas. The more I think about what differentiates these great teachers from their peers, the less I am convinced that teaching philosophy is the key distinction that sets them apart. I have thus come to the conclusion that philosophies are useless without concomitant passion for excellence. Passion for teaching always trumps philosophy, in my opinion, and thus to focus on philosophy is to miss the point.

Just as I believe that every teacher possesses a laudable teaching philosophy, I believe that every teacher begins his/her career with a high degree of passion. Over time, some teachers lose this passion, often through no fault of their own. As a result, students can begin to perceive that particular teachers are just “going through the motions” of teaching. A lack of passion, then, becomes the avenue to ineffective teaching. I guess then, in a roundabout fashion, my teaching philosophy could be described as “Never Be Satisfied”—always strive for greater and greater levels of excellence and passion. This is why I can never consider myself to be a great teacher—because I am forever inferior to my aspirations. I strive ever to be on guard against complacency—because complacency is the antithesis of passion.

## **Technology and Teaching Methodology**

As my students can attest, I’m a big believer in technology. I do *not* believe that technology can serve as an equal substitute for the instructor, but rather that technology can serve as a tremendous tool for instruction. Like any tool, of course, technology can be misused. I also believe that we are only at the very threshold of a technological revolution in education, and in the dissemination of knowledge. Anyone in the field of education who has spent more than ten minutes on the Internet should be awed by its phenomenal potential. Our students can easily perceive this potential—in fact, they may be so embedded within it that they take it for granted. Faculty and administrators, on the other, hand, occasionally fear or hate technology because it puts more control in the hands of students (and thus, less in the grip of formal educational or institutional parties).

This is highly parallel to the fear and mistrust with which Gutenberg' contribution was initially greeted. Yet it is precisely because of this learner-empowerment that we should embrace and leverage technology. We must overcome the notion that knowledge can be controlled or rationed. Instead, we must now teach our students how to analyze the vast body of information that grows relentlessly, and aspire to enable them to distinguish truth from fallacy.

### **The System and "Customer Service"**

Earlier I alluded to the notion that some teachers lose passion for their craft over time. I believe that this often occurs as the result of administrative red tape and roadblocks. As a marketing teacher, I feel justifiable in engaging the metaphor of customer service in the educational process. I realize that not all professors are comfortable with equating students with customers, but I believe this metaphor is beneficial if employed judiciously. LMU's mission is stated to be "the encouragement of learning, the education of the whole person, the service of faith, and the promotion of justice." I interpret this mission statement as a pledge of service to our students. I thus perceive this mission statement as a noble and valiant standard of customer service, and I work very hard to support and fulfill it. Yet often, I empathize with students who feel that the LMU "system" has been somewhat ineffective at addressing or serving their needs.

A true commitment to customer service is the most important objective that a business can establish, and it is also often the most difficult to effectively implement and achieve. At LMU, I believe our commitment to customer service in education is often inadequate. In this case I do not believe that a lack of passion or ability is the cause, but rather perhaps due to flaws in our organizational design. For whatever reason, I believe that we suffer from a lack of cooperation between faculty and administration. We are supposed to be on the same team, but it often does not seem that way. As a result, students are shortchanged—learning is *not* encouraged to the extent that it could be, and justice is *not* always perceived as being promoted. I look forward to a time when LMU's mission can be more consistently and collectively envisioned and achieved, and I challenge every individual at LMU to cooperate more fully to achieve our common goal of serving our students. After all, nothing at LMU matters—not the beautiful campus, not our research, not our reputation—if this institution does not serve to effectively and actively *transform* our students into whole persons with a thirst for knowledge and a passion for truth and justice.