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Teaching Statement

My teaching philosophy begins with my own lifelong commitment to learning. I never want to be satisfied with the level of knowledge I have obtained or the sharpness my skills have acquired. I want to know more and do better work, if not daily, at least in the general trajectory of my life and career. As such, I see this pursuit as a journey, one with peaks and valleys, highpoints that are challenging to reach and low areas that either signify rest or other challenges that require rethinking and retooling. In the context of teaching, this journey becomes an expedition in which I am the guide, the seasoned explorer who is leading those who would also dare to take their knowledge to new heights and their skills to advanced levels. As I have found in this role as expedition guide, three character traits stand out among the rest as instrumental to ensuring a successful journey: courage, empathy, and humility.

Courage – It may seem a bit hyperbolic to say teaching takes courage. It is not the same as a soldier's courage charging into battle or a patient's courage facing a grim diagnosis, but it is courage nonetheless. The teacher's courage is to bridge the gap between the student's ignorance and their enlightenment, between their self-doubt and their self-confidence. Teachers are entrusted with the minds of rising generations, their tasks to ensure the boundaries of knowledge continue to expand and to equip their students with tools to meet tomorrow's challenges. Though not as acutely imminent as the soldier's or the patient's, the teacher's courage necessitates that they never forget who or what inspired them to teach and that they strive to inspire their students likewise, despite the mundane tasks of daily routines. Receiving student feedback that my teaching approximates this trait is very rewarding:

- ◊ "Matt was awesome!! Any questions I ever had with homework he put in full effort to make sure I got it correct but also that I was understanding it. Really liked the examples during lab." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Spring 2023*)
- ◊ "MATT IS MY DUDE, man saved my grade was a great help when it came to homeworks, great guy also liked that he wouldn't just do the work for me but helped me understand where I was messing up. Solid TA." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Fall 2023*)

Empathy – Equally as important, the teacher must embody empathy. Arguably, there is no better teacher than failure, but failure can also be debilitating. Therefore, it is incumbent on the teacher to create a classroom environment that not only encourages the risk to fail but also the resilience to turn failure into opportunity. Key to this is the teacher's empathy. If the teacher cannot understand and share the student's emotional reaction to failure, successfully turning that failure into learning becomes unlikely, if not impossible. Studies have shown that a teacher's immediacy with their students—the closeness or trust of their relationship—correlates to student learning, and immediacy can only be built when the teacher empathizes with their students' challenges. Empathy builds trust, which in turn promotes learning. Here are a couple quotes from evaluations that emphasize empathy:

- ◊ "Great teacher, very kind and made learning and concepts understandable." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Spring 2023*)
- ◊ "Matt was always very kind and engaging! I appreciate the effort he gave this semester to this class and his students!!" (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Fall 2023*)

Humility – Not to be outshone by courage or empathy—though perhaps by intention to stay in the background—the teacher's humility is paramount. By being entrusted with the education of their students, teachers are given considerable power and influence in students' lives. Additionally, they hold the knowledge and skills the students desire to acquire. The teacher should not let this power go to their head. As brilliant and charismatic as they may be, their knowledge and skills are not total. They too had to fail and struggle to get to where they are and should not, no matter how long they have been in their career, think they have "arrived" at the summit of their learning. They too have room to still grow, and with the correct measure of humility, they may even learn from the very students they intend to teach. So, hopefully with the fortune that favors the bold, my own teaching will exemplify these three traits, courageously, empathetically, and humbly guiding my students to expand their knowledge and develop their skills. Though not directly about humility, I think these quotes show that I strive to meet students where they are in their learning journey:

- ◊ "Matt is a great teacher! He was always more than willing to help students and responded promptly to emails." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Fall 2023*)
- ◊ "Matt is a great TA. He went out of his way to help me with each homework and was patient with my questions. He helped me learn the material and was integral to my success in the class." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Fall 2023*)

Methods and Styles – I believe a broad approach to methods and styles achieves the best learning for the largest number of students. Students learn optimally in many different ways, so many different methods and styles of teaching should be used to try to reach all students. This is the approach we took in *Database Management*, which I will carry forward into all of the coursework I teach in the future. We incorporated lecture sessions, lab discussions, online tutorial videos, group projects, case competitions, and assessment through assignments, quizzes, and exams, all while also making ourselves available through office hours and by appointment for personalized instruction. Within the discussion sections, we structured most weeks with a *See One, Do One* approach, where I worked through examples of the week's work for the students to watch and follow along, then would assign a number of problems for the students to work through in groups or individually. During the *See One* part as the students followed along, I would challenge their understanding of the material with the Socratic method, trying to lead them through the steps to further understanding. These quotes touch on our success:

- ◊ "I enjoy the hands-on approach to learning. Working though the material helped me learn better opposed to just listening to someone talk." (Student evaluation, Spring 2023)
- ◊ "Being able to go through SQL query examples step by step helped me be able to structure queries on my own. Matt was also very accommodating and stayed after class to help other students struggling with assignments and concepts." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Spring 2023*)
- ◊ "Just having Matt walk through the content ever week really helped my learning." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Fall 2023*)
- ◊ "I liked the structure of the discussion and believe that it was a good mix of conceptual work and hands-on work." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Fall 2023*)
- ◊ "Coding is a very hard concept to teach, and the effort you put into helping students and teaching was very noticeable! Thank you for a great semester!" (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Fall 2023*)
- ◊ "Thanks for your willingness to help me on assignments. Exceptional knowledge of the field is apparent." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Fall 2023*)
- ◊ "Did a very good job on explaining topics in good detail and breaking them down so students could understand them." (Student evaluation, *Database Management-Fall 2023*)