

Dr. John J. Kerbs' Teaching Philosophy and Pedagogical Approach

At the core of my teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach is a commitment to participatory education that fosters critical thinking, intellectual discourse, and problem solving skills within the complex disciplines of criminology and criminal justice. Instead of using a traditional lecturing method, my approach is based on the exchange of ideas with students to peak their curiosity while developing advanced analytic skills to solve real-world problems. Because criminology and criminal justice inherently draw upon other disciplines, I develop the students' foundation in criminology and criminal justice by cross-training them in the following allied fields/disciplines: anthropology, economics, law, political science, psychology, social work, and sociology. In addition to acquiring social science knowledge, students who wish to succeed as professionals must also learn to communicate their ideas with others, work as part of a larger group, and understand the economic, legal, psychological, and social implications of their work. Hence, I structure classes at the undergraduate- and graduate-levels to include mock presentations that require students to address the various needs and concerns of potential clients, policy makers, program directors, and the general public.

To achieve these large scale teaching goals, it is vital to use multi-modal teaching approaches to provide the widest range of students with a necessary understanding of the material. Some of the tools that I use to engage the greatest number of students include Power Point class lectures, library skills trainings, videos, in-class discussions, small group discussions, and in-class exercises aimed at reinforcing the concepts and applications under examination. My courses develop critical thinking and problem solving skills because my students evaluate realistic scenarios by applying analytic frameworks, general course materials, and theories. I develop group interaction and management skills through group discussions; I also develop communication skills by requiring students to identify problematic analyses and defend proposed solutions in written and verbal contexts. One of the principal skills required for students entering jobs related to criminology and criminal justice is the ability to solve problems, either individually or as a team member. It is through the application of knowledge that students develop clear understandings of the material; as students become more successful in understanding and applying class material, they are motivated to further expand their own knowledge on a subject. In sum, I provide students with the necessary information and analytic skills required for successful careers.

On a more philosophical level, I believe that my role as teacher requires me to go beyond the confines of knowledge production and acquisition (*vis-à-vis* producing and claiming ownership of knowledge through grants and publications) to activities that foster the successful transmission of knowledge and the successful creation of knowledge via collaboration with my students. Therefore, I view teaching as an enjoyable and reciprocal challenge. It requires me to synthesize available research (including my own) on a particular subject area and articulate my thoughts in a way that engages and challenges my students, without seeming boring or pedantic. Just as surely as teaching allows me to share my knowledge with my students, it also affords me a chance to learn from my students. Teaching consequently enriches my research even as it helps me to train individuals in criminology and criminal justice.

The philosophical ideas above apply to both undergraduate and graduate students; however, I have additional goals that I use to guide my graduate-level teaching. Philosophically, I believe graduate-level education goes beyond the foundational aspects of undergraduate education to include the refinement of ideas and the ability to express detailed knowledge in student-selected subject areas. The graduate students are preparing to do more than display a working knowledge in and the successful application of theoretical frameworks and techniques for critical analysis. Graduate students are preparing for various roles to include those inhabited by experts, mentors, and teachers. Therefore, as an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice, I utilize an empowerment strategy whereby students are supported in their efforts to define and develop their *own* pedagogical styles and research agendas. To this end, I always require graduate students to write term papers and to make presentations in graduate-level seminars. Thereafter, I provide extensive feedback regarding the content, clarity, and style of all papers and presentations.

To date, my instructional portfolio has covered both undergraduate- and graduate-level courses. While at East Carolina University, I have designed and implemented the following courses: 1) Introduction to Criminal Justice (JUST1000), 2) Correctional Systems (JUST3008), 3) Community Corrections (JUST4006), 4) Juvenile Justice (JUST4200), 5) Principles of Criminal Justice (JUST6000), 6) Seminar in Research Methods and Statistical Interpretation (JUST 6001), 7) Seminar in Corrections (JUST6006), 8) Victimology (JUST6601), and 9) Diversity Issues in Criminal Justice (JUST6700). I have also developed two courses for the Curriculum Committee in the Department of Criminal Justice: 1) Introduction to Courts (JUST2200), and 2) Seminar in Research Methods and Statistical Interpretation (JUST 6001). I also voluntarily implement (every semester) multiple three-hour study-skills workshop for a wide range of ECU undergraduate students (over 1,000 to date). In all classes and workshops, I have incorporated the latest published research and web-based materials to enhance and inform my Power Point lectures and class exercises. In the final analysis, my multi-tiered approach challenges students with a high degree of difficulty to master all reading and lecture materials.

In closing, when I think about my pedagogical philosophy at ECU, I am reminded of Socrates who once wrote, "The only good is knowledge and the only evil is ignorance." My pedagogical approach aims to educate the next generation so that they are not plagued by the evils of ignorance. More importantly, I provide the next generation with sound knowledge so that their lives are enriched; and in doing so, I am collaborating with my students to co-create communities that will be enhanced by their knowledge and competence as future criminal justice professionals.