Teaching Statement

Dr. Ramon Lawrence

The most direct impact that a university faculty member can have is through inspirational teaching of undergraduate and graduate students. Although research achievements and breakthroughs are critical to the health and reputation of the institution, the very core of a university is its students and their learning. I strongly believe in the importance of excellent teaching and greatly enjoy my time in the classroom.

I am a very versatile teacher and have the ability to teach numerous courses besides database systems including software engineering, networks, operating systems, data structures, and introductory programming courses. My favorite courses to teach are the introductory courses where students are learning programming for the first time. These courses are often challenging, but they are also the most rewarding as new students appreciate quality teaching. Interacting with students who are starting to see the wonders of programming is amazing. I am very active in the supervision of students at all levels. At UBC Okanagan, I have supervised 10 undergraduate projects, 13 undergraduate theses, 4 Master's, and 1 Ph.D. student. At the University of Iowa, I supervised 3 undergraduate honours theses, 7 Master's students, and 2 Ph.D. students. I lead a database group where students perform research and development, and I engage students in database research at every opportunity.

The most important factor in being a successful educator is truly caring about the students and their success. It takes more than mastery of the material, as you must also strive to connect with students and present the material in ways that it can be easily understood. During class time, student interactivity, involvement, and participation in the learning process are essential. Course material becomes more interesting when you realize the motivations for learning it. I want students to realize value from attending class that they cannot get by simply reading the content. My goal is for every student to learn the material, pass the course, and improve their skills. Although not all succeed, every student knows that I will work with them if they put in the effort. Due to this commitment, my student reviews are consistently excellent, and I frequently receive reviews indicating that my teaching or my classes are the "*best that they have ever had*." I am a 4 time member of the UBC Okanagan Teaching Honour Roll (2007, 2009, 2010, and 2011) that recognizes professors who are in the top 10 per cent in student evaluations of teaching effectiveness.

Technology allows many new educational possibilities but also brings associated challenges. I invest considerable time in using and developing technologies for learning. I use electronic course management software to distribute course materials, and I have taught three courses that were distributed by video over the Internet to remote students. For the data structures course, I developed software that reduces the cost of assignment marking while creating a highly rewarding student experience. This work was nominated in two successive years for the President's Instructional Technology Innovation Award which is the highest innovation in teaching award at the University of Iowa. An overview paper was published in IEEE Transactions on Education and has been frequently cited. I have also created an online question system used by over 1000 students in Physics at UBC Okanagan.

Overall, I am deeply committed to teaching and strongly believe in the value of quality education. I approach teaching like science. Techniques and results should be measurable, verifiable, and improvable. Teaching provides the opportunity to have an immediate impact on students' lives. I take this opportunity very seriously, and tirelessly strive to improve my teaching style and courses.