

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT By Sue Burzynski Bullard

As an editor, I often told reporters they needed to slap a sticky note on their computers, saying “Why Should Anybody Care?” That, I told them, was the question they needed to answer for readers in every story. Without it, readers would tune out. As a teacher, I believe that’s a question I need to answer every day for students in my classroom. Without it, students will tune out.

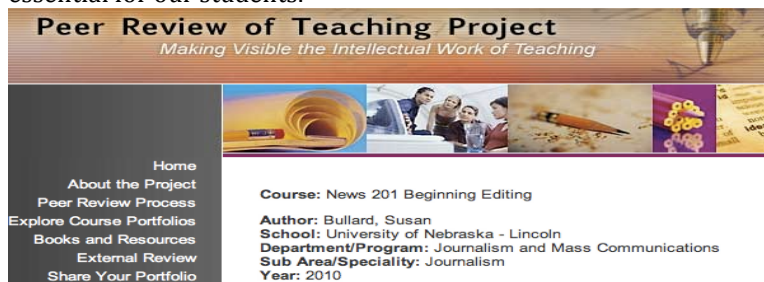
I want to make my students think, help them learn and keep them engaged. That’s not easy.

This generation of digital natives has grown up multi-tasking and surrounded by technology. Studies show they’ve spent more hours playing video games than reading books. These students, trained early on “Sesame Street,” expect learning to be entertaining. For them, it also should be fast-paced.

Today’s students demand to know the answer to “Why Should I Care?” I work hard to provide answers on their terms.

I rely on these five principles, the bedrock of my teaching philosophy, to answer that question:

- Every lesson must have a clearly defined point or objective. That’s Principle No. 1 - making sure both students and I know what that point is. As I create a syllabus, I ask myself “what should every student know by the end of this semester?” As I plan for class sessions, I ask myself “what do they really need to know about this topic?” As an example, often in my editing class, I use front pages of newspapers from around the country in class discussion. As I’m compiling front pages, I zero in on the point I’m trying to make. It may be a comparison of story play during the NCAA tourney. Why did some editors choose to play the story bigger than others? Which headlines or pictures pulled you into the story? Why did the losing team’s newspaper downplay the story? I want students to know that editors make daily decisions based on news values. Knowing the objective of using particular pages in a discussion helps me stay on point. When I participated in a Peer Review of Teaching Project I learned that too often we spend time in class on topics that have nothing to do with our learning objectives and we sometimes don’t teach concepts we say are essential for our students.



- Students must be able to relate to the lesson to understand it. Making it relevant is my Principle No. 2: This is the new “me generation.” As a teacher, I need to make sure lessons hit home. When I first taught a newsroom management class and lectured on editor and reporter collaboration, I was met with many blank stares. I had used Roy Peter Clark’s “editor as coach” model for the lesson, a successful technique with newsroom editors. But many 20-somethings had never worked in a newsroom. Some had never held a job. For them, the concepts were difficult. I had to relate my lesson to their world. Most students had worked with coaches. They had played softball, run track, participated in debate. So I asked them to draw pictures of their

best and worst coaches. I asked them to describe what made them good or bad. As memories flooded back, it was easier for students to relate that to how an editor interacts with a reporter. The track coach who never said anything positive to his team members was an easy analogy for the grumbling editor who never praised a reporter's work. Below is how one student expressed his opinion on an overbearing coach. It ignited a discussion on the traits expressed in the drawing.

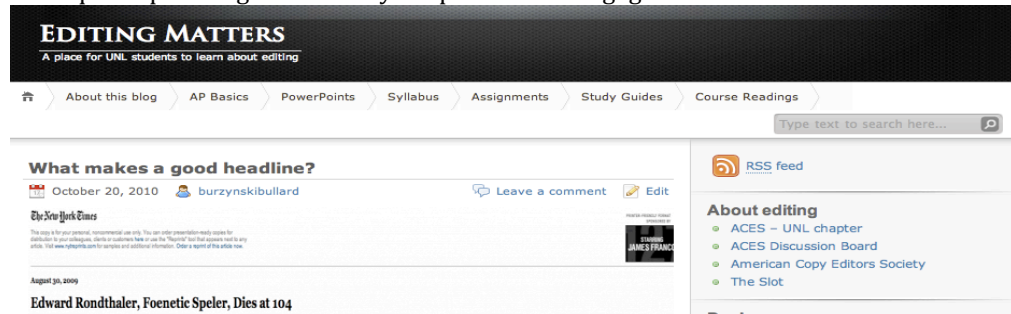


Using a variety of teaching methods is essential for a digital generation. That's my Principle No. 3: Change it up often. After all, this generation is used to information coming at them from their phones, iPods and YouTube. They don't want to hear me lecture for two hours straight. I use traditional teaching methods such as lecture, discussion and quizzes. But I also use games, role-playing, blogs, social media and short videos to reinforce my lessons. Take that lesson on editors as coaches. After drawing pictures, discussing traits of good and bad coaches, and lecturing on coaching editors, I reinforce the point with other methods. Students role-play in front of the class, using a script I've written of a reporter interacting first with a bad editor/coach and next with a good editor/coach. Finally, I show video clips of legendary coaches like John Wooden talking about leadership. I'm constantly looking for creative ways to reinforce traditional lessons. One semester, I baked punctuation cookies (see picture below) and made a video of my editing students talking about their favorite grammar rules. This helps them remember the difference between it's and its. In fact, one wrote: "After years and years of English classes, it wasn't until this past semester in your class that I finally 'got' whom vs. who."



- Good teaching takes preparation and requires loads of enthusiasm. Principle No. 4 means plan ahead - no winging it. It's difficult to engage students if you're faking it. Planning is critical. Take the way I approach headlines in an editing class. I introduce headline writing by looking at real world examples. We look at the headlines on the same story from a dozen papers. We compare and contrast, discussing what worked and what didn't. I want them to understand headlines can determine if a reader reads their stories. Next, I turn headline writing into a competition. Groups of students write headlines on the same stories. The class votes on the best headlines. Winners get Smarties candy, a sign of my enthusiasm for good headlines. To reinforce what we've discovered, they see a video I've made of [Jane Hirt, the managing editor of the Chicago Tribune](#), talking about headlines.

I've made a series of similar videos of professionals sharing expertise. I want my lessons to be current, so I use a digital textbook (which I wrote) and a class blog to post up-to-date articles. For example, one semester I linked to a newspaper editor's column apologizing for a misleading headline. I ask students to post headlines they like and explain why. My headline writing lessons still include a traditional PowerPoint with examples and tips on headline writing. And students write headlines as graded exercises. But I also use lecture to explain why SEO (search engine optimization) matters for Web headlines. And students create Twitter accounts and post tweets to showcase how microblogging mimics headline writing. All requires planning. But variety keeps the class engaged.



- Effective teachers are good role models. For me, Principle No. 5 means practicing what I preach. As someone who spent 30 years as a reporter and editor in a newsroom, it would be easy to spend all of my time talking about the good old days and lamenting industry changes. Instead, I've embraced multimedia storytelling and am enthusiastic about the possibilities. In 2012, I spent several weeks in the Chicago Tribune newsroom seeing how today's journalists use social media to report on multi-platforms. I set an example by using tools students need to succeed today. I use blogs to provide information and as writing and headline practice. Blogs demonstrate the lessons of engaging with readers as students react to my posts and to each other's comments. I've created blogs for each of my classes and written about [the use of blogs in classrooms](#) for Harvard University's Nieman Reports. I have created scores of videos of professionals offering advice on journalism and have posted the videos on YouTube and shared them with teaching colleagues. When I teach a lesson on Twitter as headline practice, I make students follow journalists who use it well. My [Twitter as headline practice lesson](#) has been featured on the Nieman Reports Professor's Corner website. I value and teach basics – students lose points for sloppy work. But they also need to understand journalism is changing. That means I do too. I can be a role model in many ways, including letting them know that I'm learning every day. Sometimes even from them.

Each year, I'm improving as a teacher. In 2014, I was named the Society of Professional Journalists Educator of the Year. In my nominating letter, then Associate Dean Charlyne Berens wrote: "Sue Bullard is the whole package: a teacher who devotes a tremendous amount of her time, effort and heart to helping her students learn to edit, to be journalists and to be responsible, contributing citizens; a scholar who is always trying to learn more and do more; and a generous colleague who shares her knowledge and skills both in her own college and with other journalists and journalism educators nationally and internationally."

In 2012, I was one of six educators from around the country selected for externships in U.S. newsrooms. In 2012, I won three separate awards for my teaching methods in Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication competitions. In 2011-12, I used UNL's advanced Peer Review of Teaching program to research whether my use of games in class improved learning and retention. In 2010, AEJMC's Mass Communication and Society Division awarded me first place in the Most Promising Professor competition for teachers with less than five years experience.

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**Bullard honored by AEJMC**

By Neil Holdway | 1:02 p.m. Sept. 14

Sue Burzynski Bullard, a member of the ACES executive committee, was named most promising professor at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications conference in Denver.

Bullard earned first place in the competition sponsored by AEJMC's Mass Communication and Society Division and Graduate Education Interest Group. The award, aimed at showcasing best practices of top



I've consistently scored highly in formal and informal teaching evaluations in all courses I have taught. Although the evaluation form and the scoring system has changed somewhat from semester to semester, I've included one question that has been consistent — how students rate my overall teaching effectiveness in editing classes. In my editing classes, as an example, I've maintained a mean score of 3.9 out of 4 in overall teaching effectiveness.

Here are typical comments from a formal evaluation in the Beginning Editing class:

Asked what assignments contributed the most to student learning, a student wrote: "Doing group projects that forced us to really dig into the AP Stylebook...." Another said: "It was really nice to see a professor so well informed on the advancement of social media and its effect on journalism. To have it be taught and acknowledged as opposed to focusing on the history and old ways of news was a really nice segment of class."

Asked what could be done to improve learning in the class, one student wrote: "Not much, it is a very well-constructed class and the teacher is amazing. I learned so much."

Similar comments were made in Advanced Editing classes. "Great professor, great class! Time went by fast and efficiently."

In 2011, several former students wrote letters nominating me for an AEJMC Newspaper Division Outstanding Teaching Award. Although I did not win the award, the letters speak to my teaching effectiveness. Here is an excerpt from one:

"To put it simply, Sue Burzynski Bullard just gets it. Bullard's classes are different: Her students look forward to attending them, and they discuss the content afterward. They apply the concepts of editing and reporting to real life. It's not just a class, but rather it's a conversation."

Several of my assignments have won awards in competitions sponsored by AEJMC. In 2012, I was recognized for three separate assignments. One used games to teach AP Style; another compared and contrasted coverage in different publications; and a third used live tweets for news coverage.

Through the Peer Review program, my previous role on the college's assessment committee and as 2010 journalism coordinator for PEARL, I've learned the value of assessment in gauging my effectiveness. In other words, are students learning what I am trying to teach them? In 2012, preliminary research in my advanced Peer Review project demonstrated that using games to teach grammar helped students retain knowledge.

I've used some form of assessment in all of my classes. In Beginning Editing, I have used a combination of pre-test / post-test, pre-survey / post-survey and a portfolio review by outside professionals. As an example, in self-assessment surveys, taken at both the beginning and end of the semester in Beginning Editing, students said their skills in five key areas had improved substantially. In one class section, only 14.2 percent rated their headline skills outstanding or very good at the beginning of the semester. That went up to 100 percent at the end of the semester. That indicates students perceive the lessons have value. Beyond the self-survey, an assessment quiz — taken at the

beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester — also showed substantial gains. In one section, the average score jumped from 58 to 82.25. The low score went from 46 to 74. And the high score went from 74 to 94. Translated, the student perceptions are correct: They are learning journalism skills. The results from three students on the pre- and post-tests in one year give you an indication of how much students are learning in this class. The mid-level student showed the most progress in many areas. She nearly doubled her score from the pre-test to the post-test (50 to 98) and earned an A- in the class overall. The lowest-scoring student, who earned a C in the class, upped his score from 28 on pre-test to 76 on post-test. Newspaper professionals have consistently rated the course material highly, using a rubric that aligns with AEJMC goals.

The five principles that make up my teaching philosophy answer the “why should I care” question for my students.

And what’s the answer to that question for me? Why do I teach? Why do I care? Because I love the moments when I know a lesson has clicked. A student sent me this note after a headline lesson:

“Headlines aren’t really what I look at when I’m reading a newspaper.... After this week’s class, I have been paying a lot more attention to headlines. I almost feel like a 5-year-old on a sugar rush when I open the newspaper. ‘Oh that looks interesting!’ ‘That looks cool!’”

When I incorporated Twitter into my editing class, many students were initially skeptical. But one summer, a student emailed me:

“I just wanted to let you know that at my internship this summer at the Jewish Press I was asked to make a Twitter account.... So I just wanted to say thank you for assigning us the Twitter homework and helping us learn Twitter because it really did help with my job. “

Another student emailed me from her internship to tell me this:

“Your editing class has made me a crazy woman! I scrutinize the paper and the mistakes are making me insane.... I’ve started reading grammar blogs.”

And finally, a student who landed a prestigious internship at NPR sent me this: “I just wanted to let you know that yesterday the producer of “All Things Considered” was raving about my headlines and how they are the most important thing about this industry. And then she sent me two more emails today about how great they were — and how it’s the most important skill to have. I just wanted to let you know. . because everything, literally EVERYTHING, I learned about headlines came from YOU!”

For me, those notes are the answer to why I teach. And they explain why I care too.