Teaching Philosophy, Hongyi Zhu

Management Information Systems (MIS) is an interdisciplinary major across business, management, and information technology (IT). Thus, MIS students have wider learning spectrums. To improve students' learning effectiveness, I developed four essential tenets of my teaching philosophy. First, mastering MIS concepts and their connections sets the foundation of applications. Second, embracing novel IT tools and techniques can improve the learning experience. Third, real-world examples and hands-on practices are the most effective learning contents. Fourth, teaching in MIS requires continuous refinement.

I believe understanding MIS concepts and connections sets the foundation of applications. Most courses in MIS such as operations management, web mining, and business communications are application-driven. Students apply models and techniques learned in class to different business scenarios. Understanding the basic concepts and their connections behind the models and techniques helps students extract the most relevant information, select and apply appropriate tools, and make rational business decisions in their applications. To address the importance, one approach I used was sharing the concept maps I created with students as their learning guides across topics. I also encourage students to create their knowledge maps to enhance their learning.

I believe embracing novel IT tools and techniques can improve the learning experience. We are teaching the post-millennial generation. They are technique-savvy, heavy social-media users who can quickly search, extract information, and adopt new technology. These students can acquire customized information to support their learning with techniques such as search engine. Also, students learn in different styles. Visual learners use visual clues to assist their learning while kinesthetic learners might learn better while practicing. I explore and introduce to students software and online services that cater to their needs for individual learning and group collaboration.

I believe real-world examples and hands-on practices are the most effective learning contents. Because of the application-driven nature of MIS, mastering knowledge and tools that can tackle real problems improves student's self-efficacy. Thus, real-life context and life-relevant hands-on practices are essential in course design. For example, most undergraduate students have no working experiences. Therefore, they can hardly relate concepts in operations management to their lives. As one of my class activities, I adopted the beer distribution game for the supply-chain management topic. They experienced demand fluctuations similar to those faced by the real business. Students effectively referred to the gameplay in the following learning activities. In addition to setting up the life-relevant context, scaffolding the semester project into multiple hands-on milestone-practices that tightly connect to the different learning objectives can also help students grow in their Zone of Proximal Development.

I believe teaching in MIS requires continuous refinement. Emerging business models and IT technologies reshape our understanding of MIS. Replacing obsolete contents with latest industry/academia developments, such as deep learning, that students are aware of can add to the novelty and life-relevance in our teaching. Moreover, as an MIS teacher, we should always learn together with our students, understand their perceptions towards modern technology, inspire their critical thinking, and, after all, reflect and refine our teaching.

To conclude, my four-tenet teaching philosophy ground timely, life-relevant, hands-on application-driven learning on fundamental MIS concepts and novel IT tools and techniques. I believe this philosophy can improve MIS student's learning effectiveness and meet the education goal of MIS programs.