

Wes Grooms

Teaching Philosophy and Experience

My teaching strategies provide students in public sector professional education programs marketable skills and a broader understanding of the society in which they desire to be change agents. As detailed below, I bring about this realization by directly engaging students with the concepts of ontology and epistemology, and through experiential and/or service learning assignments, and 'learning by teaching' assignments.

To engage ontology and epistemology, I have students in my online undergraduate Urban Theory and Political Economy course begin by reading brief narratives about these concepts and then watching the 1999 film "The Matrix." Afterwards, they write a reaction paper in which they describe how the film's depiction of humans serving as unconscious cocooned batteries for an oppressive alien species, yet distracted from realizing their plight through continual 'programming,' are explained through their new understanding of epistemological and ontological forces in contemporary society. Regular weekly assignments have each student, in turn, posting video presentations on assigned material; the non-presenting students develop questions from the readings and post them on the course discussion board. The presenting student answers these by drawing specifically from the assigned material. One student's evaluation comment evidences the effectiveness of these assignments: "I can see and understand urban settings in fine detail now, and my knowledge of our world has increased greatly because of your teaching."

To help students in my undergraduate Environmental Policy course connect theory to practice, they locate articles on the internet and write brief narratives that explicitly identify within them the policymaking challenges or processes covered in that week's readings. To develop their synthesizing skills, students write a 10-page thought paper in which they must holistically summarize a subset of course readings and then marshal those readings through citations to support the narrative of their personal environmental experiences and/or concerns.

To develop my Fundamentals of Public Administration students' knowledge gathering, data analysis, and synthesizing skills, they write abstracts every week for each assigned reading. At the start of each class, every student writes their version of the 'problem,' 'thesis,' 'methods/discussion,' 'implications,' and 'conclusion' sections of their abstract on the classroom whiteboards. I facilitate class debate about each of these components until consensus is reached and students produce a final written abstract; this assignment promotes development of both collaboration and conflict resolution skills. I also assign thought papers in this course and the graduate Public Management course I teach.

I utilize experiential assignments in my undergraduate honors Dogs in Society course; the students volunteer 10 hours with an organization to inform reflective papers about how their experiences contradicted or corroborated the course material, thereby facilitating development of their critical thinking skills. To develop public presentation skills, they also conduct research about, then orally present on, the organizations' missions as well as their operational challenges.

Finally, I will have program evaluation students conduct annual self-accreditation evaluations of the degree program. These assignments will purvey practical, marketable skills as well as permit student collaboration on this aspect of my research agenda. I am also developing a theory course utilizing needs assessments and program logic modeling assignments to produce a visualization of theory's role as proxy for impact evaluations; this assignment intends to instill frequently absent student appreciation of the uses of theory.

In sum, I am committed to continual pedagogy innovation in the service of purveying the critical thinking, and practical, marketable skills, students desire for purposes of achieving public sector normative goals through their professional practice.