

Statement of Teaching Philosophy – Na Zuo

My teaching centers on the **Think – Do – Feel** dynamic of student learning grounded in Fink’s work on an integrated approach to create significant learning experiences¹. The **Think** helps students to acquire foundational *knowledge* in agricultural economics and agribusiness management. In my courses, I focus on unpacking three key questions in the field: (1) What are and how do the organizations along the food supply chain convert and move inputs and outputs of food to consumers? (AREC 315, AREC/PPEL 210); (2) What economics and management principles guide the consumer and producer behaviors to achieve an efficient and incentive compatible market? (AREC 304, AREC 315, AREC 450/550, AREC/PPEL 210, AREC/NSC 365); (3) What and how policies can address food market inefficiency and market failures, especially on the pressing issues of food insecurity and food waste? (AREC/NSC 365, AREC 304). The **Do** equips students with *skills* to do the practical work of an economist and/or a business manager. I prioritize three key skills across my courses: (1) How to think critically and creatively? (2) How to analyze, evaluate, predict, and communicate quantitatively with data? and (3) How to structure, write and manage complex projects such as a business plan, company financial assessments, or research surveys, individually and in teams? The **Feel** addresses *affections* related to student motivation, attitude, and sense of belonging that creates energy for learning. In my course design, I mindfully weave in these affection aspects with the three guiding questions: (1) How would students develop a sense of belonging and commitment to their learning and the field? (2) What and how should students learn about responsibility, leadership, cultural competency, teamwork, citizenship, and ethics? (3) How can students develop and enact their own learning agenda? Along with these pedagogical principles, I form the following cornerstones of my teaching philosophy, working towards more effective teaching and learning.

Be challenging and supportive. I communicate two messages on my first day of classes: first, I thrive to be a teacher that is challenging and supportive; second, the whole class is a learning community, and we are in the course together. The first semester that I started teaching at the University of Arizona, one student wrote “*challenge me*” in the background survey. Reading it confirmed my belief in challenging students to fulfill their best potential. Coming into my classes, students expect a demanding course with high standards. Meeting the challenges is never easy. That is when my supportive approach and the sense of learning community comes in. I approach each class as a learning community, where all students feel safe, welcomed, and motivated to share and contribute to our learning experience. During the pandemic when all of us were challenged, it became even clearer to me that an open and inclusive learning environment should have top priority in course design – it is critical to the learning of underserved students and necessary for the rest. It is my goal to create an open, safe, and supportive learning environment where all students can challenge themselves and learn outside of their comfort zone.

Stay relevant, stay applicable. I adapt Authentic and Active Learning practices in my teaching and craft applied assignments that integrate knowledge and skills with authenticity to better motivate and engage learners. Students in the Introduction to Commerce course apply management tactics in their own career plan and personal finance. In the Agribusiness Management course, each student creates a business plan of their own entrepreneurial ideas. Adopting the Course-based Undergraduate Research Experience (CURE) model, the Food Economy class designs and analyzes a UA Food Insecurity survey, collaborating with the UA Campus Pantry. The course project in Fall 2020 was reported by the Arizona Daily Wildcat entitled “Food insecurity among UA students doubled during the pandemic” in April 2021. When students relate the content with the application, interests are stimulated, questions are raised, an active learning environment is present thus deeper learning takes place.

Be professional and personable. A true educator always goes beyond teaching a course to cultivate students’ personal development and prepare students for their careers and dreams. I model myself to be the professional that I aspire my students to be. I believe intentional course design would gradually shape students’ professional conducts. I ask students to develop and maintain a time budget to exercise time management. I respond to and make changes based on student feedback to demonstrate constant learning and improving. I use innovative assignments like an immersive Project Manager and Private Contractor model to allow students to practice leadership as well as professional and effective communications in team environments. Ultimately, student growth as a person and a professional show the value of education. The internal reward to the educator is beyond expression.

In conclusion, I thank my students. It is their feedback that guides me to improve. It is their nodding in confirmation, passionate work and efforts that deepen my love of teaching. As a return, I strive to equip all students with solid knowledge and exquisite skills to enter the professional world, meeting the challenges they are facing, and we are facing.

¹ Fink, L. D. (2013). *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*. (2nd ed.) Jossey-Bass.