

Diego Tibaquirá – Teaching Philosophy

My philosophy of teaching developed from my own personal experiences. Over the years, I have come to believe that every student is pre-destined to be successful, but along the way, some may encounter obstacles that make it harder for them to achieve their full potential. However, what is key is opportunity and champions along the way.

I grew up in the Bronx, NY and the opportunities to succeed were scarce. I still attempted to start my college education; however, my first attempt at College ended in my dropping out. In my fifth semester at City College of New York working towards a Civil Engineering degree, I had a C in Calculus and dropped my first programming class. I then joined the United States Marines where I served for 8 years. In the Marines, I worked in Computers. Once in North Carolina serving at Chery Point Air Base, I realized I needed to go back to college, so, I enrolled in the local Community College—by far the best decision of my life. I decided on a Computer Science Major and my Professors offered all the help I needed to be successful. They offered me advice, support, straight talk, encouragement, and much more. Craven Community College reshaped my life and gave me the tools I needed for success at larger higher-education institutions (University of North Carolina at Greensboro and North Carolina A&T).

The core of what I learned is that I should make the most of every opportunity I encounter. Along my academic journey, I have found people believing in me and motivating me to achieve much more than I could ever imagine I was capable of accomplishing. In my teaching, I work towards being that person for my students. To this day, I remember my interview for the faculty position at Miami Dade College. I was asked: “Why teach at a Community College?” My answer was centered around my history and my experience at Craven Community College. I understand that students face challenges—I have experienced some of them as well. Because I have a similar academic background as many of our students, I understand how many of them, unfortunately, give up at the first sign of an obstacle. Mostly, I understand that my duty to our students goes beyond the classroom. I’m entrusted with creating an environment making students feel welcomed and connected. My students are engaged and ready to learn because they know I give 100% to see them succeed.

In the classroom, I work towards creating a safe, respectful and personal atmosphere so students get the most out of this interaction with each other to maximize their experiences. I begin with an ice breaker, allowing each person to introduce him/herself and share something about them that makes them unique. Sharing a piece of candy, chocolate bar, snack, coffee, etc. helps people to connect. I want to make everyone feel comfortable with themselves and within the group so that the conversations can be deeper and much more fruitful. Allowing every member of the group to be heard in a respectful and non-judgmental manner is very important.

Outside the classroom, I work to ensure that our curriculum is relevant and enables student gain work relevant skills. In the summer of 2017, I was approached by the Dean of the School of Engineering and Technology to teach a Security+ Bootcamp with the intention of helping students get Security+ Certified. I got 100% of the students to pass the Industry Certification.

From that experience, I was approached to be the PI (Principal Investigator) in a Cybersecurity grant sponsored by the NSF and I was asked to be the Co-PI in a Cloud Computing NSF grant as well. Both grants were awarded totaling over \$500,000. Both grants have created new programs in Cybersecurity and Cloud Computing and are geared towards helping underrepresented minorities in STEM.

In addition to my academic work, I have worked with students as advisor of various organizations and helped create 3 more on campus: computer society – IEEE, engineering organization – Engineers for a Sustainable World, and a humanitarian student organization: SAID – Students Aiding International Development. With IEEE, we attended and competed at the regional level and I was selected advisor of the year. In ESW, I advised a group of students that did two amazing projects. The first, was a solar powered smoothie car and the second was a solar power cell phone charging stations. Both projects were fully functional and were utilized on campus. With SAID, we organized 3 different major events (All-Nighter for Haiti – twice and HER Concert for Congo). Overall, the events raised over \$80,000 to aid projects in Haiti and Congo. In Haiti, the money was used to build Tilapia Farms and in Congo the money was used to build a safe house for rape victims. In 2018, I led a group of students on a Cancer Awareness Campaign that included its very own 5K walk, Workshops and seminars, and a Festival for the Cures. The project raised over \$21,000 to be donated to National Foundations working on Cancer research.

In April 2014, I was asked to become the Lead advisor for Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) for a second time, I was advisor from 2005-2009 and I have held this position for approximately 10 years overall. When I began the work, however, I genuinely possessed little knowledge of what it entailed. Furthermore, we faced various obstacles including inheriting a chapter that had no stars and very low membership with only 33 new members. My initial goals for the club included making the chapter a five-star chapter, acquiring more than 100 new members for the first time in chapter history (we are a small campus), attending regional and International Conferences, and maximizing the scholarship opportunities for our members. The three-year plan was accomplished the first year. With hard work, we had 112 new members, became a five-star chapter, and had a student win All-USA and another student win Jack Kent Cooke. This is a quick lay out of what we have accomplished:

- 2014:
 - Jack Kent Cooke Winner
 - 2 All-Florida Academic Team Winners
- 2015:
 - Jack Kent Cooke Winner
 - All-USA Winner
 - 2 All-Florida Academic Team Winners
 - Coca-Cola Leadership of Promise – 4 Winners
 - 112 new members
 - 5 star
- 2016:

- Jack Kent Cooke Winner
- All-USA Winner
- Coca-Cola Gold Winner
- 2 All-Florida Academic Team Winners
- Coca-Cola Leadership of Promise – 2 Winners
- 111 new members
- 5 star
- 2017:
 - Jack Kent Cooke Winner
 - Coca-Cola Bronze Winner
 - 2 All-Florida Academic Team Winners
 - Coca-Cola Leadership of Promise – 7 Winners
 - 260 new members
 - 5 star
- 2018
 - Jack Kent Cooke Winner
 - Hites Scholarship Winner
 - Coca-Cola Bronze Winner
 - 2 All-Florida Academic Team Winners
 - Coca-Cola Leadership of Promise – 8 Winners
 - 245 new members
 - 5 star
- 2019
 - Jack Kent Cooke Winner
 - All-USA Winner
 - Hites Scholarship Winner
 - All Century Scholar
 - 2 All-Florida Academic Team Winners
 - Coca-Cola Leadership of Promise – 8 Winners
 - 245 new members
 - 5 star
 - We received the following recognitions at this year's National Convention
 - Administrator of the Year
 - Advisor of the Year
 - Officer of the Year
 - Best Honors in Action Project (On P.A.R. with Cancer)

In November 2019, I received the PTK Faculty Scholar Recognition, an award which I proudly accepted, as it culminates my hard work with my students. This recognition fuels me to continue my work.

In all, students have been awarded over \$1,200,000 in scholarship money over the past six years. Many have been accepted at ivy-league schools like Princeton, Harvard, Cornell, MIT and Stanford, as well as other elite universities.

In conclusion, my philosophy is to help students maximize their academic journeys, to create leaders, and to motivate as many students as I can to become trailblazers and successful in their chosen field. This is done daily with love, devotion and compassion for those, who like me, needed one opportunity to change their life.