

# Teaching

## PRELIMINARY COMMENTS - Starting a course

Dr. Paul R. Carr

1. “The more I know, the less I know” (unknown).
2. “Imagination is more important than knowledge” (Einstein).
3. What is important is learning, not teaching.
4. Learning is a process. We are never finished.
5. What you put into learning is fundamental in relation to what you take away from it, for this or any other course.
6. It is important that we establish a comfort-zone for discussing issues, some of which might be controversial. Embrace the opportunity to become engaged in the issues shaping our reality.
7. Respect and consideration for diverse vantage-points is critical.
8. Critical reflection requires time, analysis, experience, and advanced thinking. Be open to theory and oppositional view-points.
9. Reading is an important medium for absorbing ideas. The written word requires the internalization of concepts at one's own rhythm, forcing and nourishing the reader to simultaneously digest and reflect on words, meaning, ideas and thoughts.
10. Multimedia, such as video, DVD, radio, television, film, podcasts and the Internet, etc., provide texture and form to materials that may otherwise be inaccessible, and also provide diverse and divergent voices and images. Understanding how the media works, what issues are presented and how, and how to consider information and data are integral components to political literacy.
11. The Instructor does not have all of the right answers. Learning is about challenging, listening, articulating, and being engaged. Don't accept everything the Instructor, or anyone else, says as being indisputable fact.
12. There is marked difference between cynicism and being critical. We need to avoid placing people in silos because they have a certain opinion. One is not anti-patriotic for criticizing the war in Iraq, nor is one racist for disputing the merits of affirmative action. Issues and arguments are necessarily more complex and multi-layered than simplistic notions “us and them”.

13. Learning in a group requires different skills but is compatible with individual learning. However, work is required in order for it to be constructive learning.
14. Don't be discouraged if things do not make sense immediately.
15. Be humble when thinking about issues/approaches/models/theories/ideologies that are not generally accepted. Why do people think the way they do? How does society work? Are we fair, honest, democratic, free, etc., just because we say that we are or because it is in the Constitution?
16. Consider the meaning of epistemology, and how we know and discover the *truth*.
17. Think of what is omitted from what we see, hear, and know, and formulate questions that are outside of mainstream knowledge.
18. Let your mind travel while critically interrogating who we, and others, are. Are we really who we think we are, and what does one's identity, either socially constructed or real, mean to one's life's experience?
19. Life is complex. Enjoy the learning-process. It may not be an opportunity for eternal mediation but it should stimulate the neurons to alter some of the troubles and monotony we face in daily life.
20. Although grades may seem important, critical engagement is much more enriching, valuable, and uplifting. While it is unlikely that anyone will ever ask what grade you got in a course or a degree, you may be asked what you learned. Similarly, critical engagement is almost always correlated with good grades.