

# Teaching Statement

Gerard Michel Awanou

I will describe in this statement my teaching experience, the use of technology and my approach to teaching which involves developing relationships with students.

I began teaching mathematics at the University of Georgia in the spring of 1999 when I was asked to run several differential calculus labs. These labs at UGA require students to write reports on Maple based projects. Calculus labs were usually at that time part of my assignments. I wrote myself a Maple project on portfolio optimization in spring 2003. Beginning fall 2002 my lab was fully WebCT based. WebCT stands for web course tools and it facilitates the creation of web based learning environments. In the labs I emphasized written mathematics and problem solving skills. George Polya's book had been quite useful to me in formulating the concepts I transfer. My experience in the labs and as a tutor of the math department gave me insight into the problems faced by students.

I have taught a pre-calculus class, a college algebra class and two calculus classes. This fall of 2004, I'm teaching Linear Algebra and Differential Equations, an undergraduate class.

The approach I take in the classroom is to motivate the concepts and show the intuition behind them. I then raise my students' awareness on the difficulties in performing the computations. Put it differently, my goal is to make them be part of the building process of the lecture. In this process I take a lot of questions from the students. This is at times risky, but the reward is great. The students get to ask deep questions, and I can detect the misconceptions and integrate the corrections into the lecture. On the other hand, they are more likely to pay attention to me when I'm answering their questions. I also use past homework questions in the lecture. I have found that by sending students to the board, they reach a better understanding and other students can see what mistakes to avoid.

Developing relationships with students is very important to me. This is the part of teaching I enjoy most. I tell my students that I rely on them to let me know if they are following and that the more questions they ask, the more they will benefit. Early in the semester I make clear to them, I know their names and I constantly encourage them to visit me in my office or attend help sessions. I specifically invite to my office anyone who is not doing well. This time together contributes to the creation of an environment in which my students feel comfortable and can express their mind.

I like to think that I'm doing a very important job. It is always a surprising pleasure for me to learn that some of my students become math majors. I thrive to do an excellent work at teaching because I do not like mediocrity. I talk a lot to successful

teachers, and I have found a few books on teaching very useful. I would like to single out *Mastering the Techniques of Teaching* by J. Lowman. It is a pleasure to learn that people enjoy my lab and my classes and even a greater pleasure when a student later after the class lets me know that I was very helpful.