

Najmah Thomas, PhD - Teaching Philosophy

The motivation I have for teaching and research developed mainly as a result of fifteen years of professional experience within the public sector, serving in government and nonprofit organizations of varying levels of complexity. It is the opportunity to infuse real-world experiences with theoretical perspectives in the classroom that I find particularly valuable and worthwhile. I consider myself to be a learning coach, and as such, I make intentional efforts to go beyond the standard delivery of classroom instruction. I am able to mentor students and contribute to their intellectual growth by sharing my professional experiences and lessons learned. Moreover, I encourage students to gain new perspectives by sharing projects that I am currently conducting research on, such as Collaboration Strategies for Public and Nonprofit Organizations, Organizational Development and Capacity Building, Youth Leadership Development, and Servant Leadership.

A series of rich educational and professional experiences have prepared me to provide quality instruction in the subjects of Non-profit Management, Public Administration, Public Policy and Leadership Studies at the undergraduate or graduate level. Some of the specific courses that I am highly qualified to teach include: Public and Nonprofit Organizational Behavior; Theories and Models of Leadership; Organizational Leadership; State and Local Intergovernmental Relations; Public and Nonprofit Budgeting and Accounting; Nonprofit Fundraising and Volunteer Development; Grant Writing and Contract Administration; Research and Data Analysis in Public Administration; and Program Evaluation for Public and Nonprofit Organizations.

The course objectives that I establish follow a progressive path to learning, which includes knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation; the terminal point for specific learning objectives depends on the course level and the subject matter background of my students. For example, learning objectives for an introductory course in Nonprofit Management may only cover knowledge, comprehension, and application of the fundamentals for nonprofit management, whereas objectives for an intermediate course on the same topic may extend to analysis of various management practices, synthesis of seemingly conflicting theories, and evaluation of the outcomes of various management tactics. In general, I have developed standard objectives for student learning, to include the ability to recognize the philosophical frameworks for public administration and leadership, identify the primary issues affecting public organizations and leaders of those organizations, cite examples of appropriate governance and management practices for public organizations, and analyze ethical issues that impact public organizations.

It is my goal for each student taking a course that I facilitate to gain a deeper understanding of the foundational concepts in the field of public administration, exhibit enhanced critical thinking skills, develop their ability to prepare and present concise and well-supported arguments, and establish the skill and aspiration to link public policy theory to implementation. My teaching style allows learners to consider and reexamine the key ideas and assumptions that shape the production of knowledge in the field of Public Policy and Administration, and particularly where this field intersects with Leadership Studies.

I am also able to provide quality instruction in the asymmetric learning environment. As a previous graduate of an online master's degree program, I found my educational experience to be quite rewarding, both in the process as well as the outcome in terms of career advancement. I also understand that today's consumers of higher education includes non-traditional adult learners who require flexible, yet rigorous education options to advance in their chosen career fields. In my classroom setting, I often utilize many online resources that make learning more accessible, such as Blackboard, web-based study groups, and the virtual library. I use a combination of lecturing, student-led discussions, and small group work to encourage student engagement in the learning process. Experience has shown that a mix of assessment types, to include research papers, group projects, oral presentations, and standard exams allow for accommodation of different learning styles present in the classroom.

As a learning coach, I take particular care to measure my instructional effectiveness on a regular basis. In order to determine whether I am meeting the established learning objectives, I employ real-time methods, such as student question and answer sessions, as well as technology-aided feedback such as online surveying. I also use student evaluations to develop new strategies for enhancing student participation and achievement. Further, I use feedback received from observations by other faculty members and evaluators to improve my teaching skills. Finally, I am constantly involved in research and public administration projects, in order to stay current on emerging theory and practices that can be incorporated into my classroom.