

A one-sentence summary of each of 68 points supporting what I do to intentionally look different at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology

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I apologize that some of these really deserve a fuller explanation, but I did my best.

Most have some apparent face validity, from the perspective described.

Group A is a list of specific educational reasons; why this makes sense in teaching my classes. Many of the points cite particular growth experiences I believe my students derive.

Group B is further reasons related to being a professor here, in a teaching school dedicated to innovation. And they relate to my personal background.

These are all derived from my desire to provide a new "set" for the experiences students have here. They are not a single line of logic, every point of which I expect anyone else to agree with. Indeed, subsets of them could make useful discussion points among faculty and students here.

For example, some of the supporting ideas in Group A presume it's good for students to be more socially challenged at Rose, by having to get along with a wider range of people, especially people guiding their classes -- that this is a positive example toward graduating into an even more diverse engineering workforce. Like, working for organizations with diverse leadership, or doing work for customers with unexpected value systems. Maybe that's worth kicking around?

You could pick out any of these 68, or some cluster of them like that, to open a conversation.

I've written more behind each one of the points, with some references. It's a start on a book of ideas for teachers wanting to evolve a crazy notion of their own. Like, a checklist of things I considered, which they may want to use as perspectives, too. The only standard to compare against shouldn't be whatever moribund one they are trying to fix.

A. Specific teaching reasons with my students:

1. **Their need for personal growth** - The starting point for a lot of higher education is to stretch students in new directions, not just add on in ways they expect.
2. **A chance to get this growth** - Exposing students to more challenging interpersonal experiences propels this; their current social game is "off."
3. **Change agents** - Our students need to become this and I model it.

4. **Novelists** - Software engineering is a green discipline and students fabricate solutions, partly from their imagination, so stimulate that.
5. **Blossoming in flexibility** - They need to become good at working on a diverse engineering team.
6. **Design work** - It's an abrupt process, with regular setbacks; I reset "what we're doing" every day when I walk in the room.
7. **Self-reliance** - By learning to respond properly to complex social encounters, they'll feel capable of doing this.
8. **Synthesis** - Software is all about synthesis, and the methods change, even within one project (which is why we have retrospectives after each Sprint).
9. **Leaders** - I don't want them to be the engineer who shrinks from technical leadership.
10. **The need for more diverse software engineers** - I encourage those by being one.
11. **Strong metaphors** - I exemplify taking on personas, lots of different ones.
12. **Empowering conversations** - Being off-beat opens up students to discuss social situations on their teams, for instance.
13. **A visual puzzle** - Many CSSE students are "visual learners"; I stimulate to that.
14. **Study abroad comes to Rose** - We're struggling to bring intercultural experiences to our students; here one is now.
15. **Examples of failure** - Google wants them to know how to fail gracefully; they can watch me do that, in some of my more daring appearance combinations.
16. **Teamwork openness** - Trust is all about vulnerability.
17. **Recognizing that they cubbyhole** - Men especially marginalize the contributions of women, without even knowing they do it.
18. **Putting attitudes toward minorities on the table** - The majority always presume they are doing the right thing when they censor minorities; sovereignty invents its own logic.
19. **Ethics in action** - Proves to students that, in the long run, the rational and ethical can prevail over prejudice and stereotyping.
20. **Teaches social complexity** - College students often are stuck at the place where they believe social differences are matters of what's right, or who's right, and the map of that isn't too messy.
21. **Informally, it is working** - I believe our CSSE majors have become less openly "snarky" since 2006, when I started my appearance program.
22. **Reinforces my teaching style** - I exemplify exploring the nebulous options of hard problems, in the cautious, Gestalt fashion that good software teams use to approach these.
23. **Can Maslow explain?** - I don't indeed want my students to end up as "programmer savants"¹ when they could instead be stretched to grow in more social ways while here at Rose, filling out their hierarchy of needs below being immersed in the flow of coding.

¹ A term coined by my wife, for some of her software developer colleagues, when she was an assembly-level programmer at NCR.

- 24. **Student mental effort is required** - The time spent intently problem solving makes the knowledge and skills stick; I add flavor to that intensity.
- 25. **And so is motivation** - I exemplify being intrinsically motivated to deal with the social side of our business.
- 26. **Driving needed growth** - Students without that social interest need to be nudged toward it.
- 27. **A needed critique of computer science** - CS departments are pretty smug; looking like idiots is a good way to reset that.

B. Further reasons why doing this makes sense at Rose:

- 1. **We need individual initiative** - In addition to implementing a unified diversity plan, we need everyone trying their own improvement ideas.
- 2. **Epitomizing the “other”** - As a member of Rose’s straight, white, male, mostly Christian majority, this has been a once-in-a-lifetime chance to know how life is as a clearly identifiable minority member.
- 3. **The symbolism of modeling** - Taking after others sincerely is a compliment, and they recognize that.
- 4. **My own personal growth** - Personifying other groups, even on the surface, gives me new perspective on those groups.
- 5. **It’s in my roots** - I had Mennonite ancestors who defied laws, for instance.
- 6. **Life as a canvas** - Reaching into my closet to find some disconcerting combination that will have a new impact is, in itself, an act of ingenuity, and it sparks these feelings in students who try to figure it out each day.
- 7. **A “set” for brainstorming** - It’s perfect for heading-up creativity sessions themselves, which I also do at Rose.
- 8. **My looks are intellectually daunting** - People who comment on my symbolizations discover, in their dialogue, how personal such impressions are.
- 9. **Unveils discrimination in action** - Makes more visible, to the majority here, how their own prejudice works, by noticing how some of our own react with derision or condemnation.
- 10. **Aims for the heart** - Countering discrimination successfully requires an appeal to people’s emotions, not to their heads; showing commitment to it does that.
- 11. **Proves we have academic freedom** - It’s an integral part of my expression of teaching, and therefore ok.
- 12. **Brings up unconscious feelings** - Makes people I encounter rethink how they relate to others.
- 13. **It can be a long-term program** - It’s a long-term direction I can experiment with, over time.
- 14. **I need to keep exploring effectiveness** - This needs to be associated with other actions at Rose, to really improve diversity in CS.

15. **An outside investigation of proper social limits** - If you agree Kohlberg's stages of moral development² define a proper direction for maturity, then principles trump conventionality.
16. **Explorations in masculinity** - In our society, men see themselves as the subject, the actor, versus being the object acted upon; any reversal of this position is uncomfortable, and all it takes is what Jacques Lacan called "the gaze" of someone else to threaten our male autonomy.
17. **A taboo killer** - By increasing familiarity here at Rose, I can help eliminate senseless morés like those against cross-dressing and against adopting the traits of "the other," in general.
18. **It's refreshing** - Dream of being able to express yourself uniquely, without the apprehension of unrelenting intimidation.
19. **A William Perry lesson** - We try very hard to move our students from being stuck in Perry's dualism, as freshmen, to making their own informed choices from shades of gray, as seniors.³
20. **Applied iconoclasm** - How far do we take the notion that made-up blends beat purity?
21. **Reinforces something we all do** - What are the actual mechanics of an encounter with another person?
22. **A Milton Bennett extension** - His model ends with integration of difference as its highest level, what I do.
23. **Making a revolution by enacting a revolution** - Kotter and Whitehead's "four ways to kill a good idea" are fear mongering, delay, confusion, and ridicule (or character assassination);⁴ people can see all those enacted against an innocent person.
24. **Strategic aberrance** - Sociologists from Durkheim to Merton and Marjorie Garber⁵ hold that deviance serves necessary functions in society, clarifying boundaries and facilitating social developments.
25. **Lifelong learning for our students** - Students should grasp the novelty nugget because it works in the other direction, too -- They will be change agents.
26. **Starting to tussle with hidden horizons** - Debating important issues on a shared task with unfamiliar people is an example of Douglas Stone, *et al's* "difficult conversations,"⁶ in the sense that our personal and cultural backgrounds give us a varying set of facts and interpretations about the situation.

² See for example the discussion of this model at <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~ncoverst/Kohlberg%27s%20Stages%20of%20Moral%20Development.htm>.

³ See the Perry stages described at <http://www.jmu.edu/geology/evolutionarysystems/protected/handouts/willperry2.pdf>.

⁴ *Buy-in: Saving your good idea from getting shot down*, by John P. Kotter and Lorne A. Whitehead, 2010.

⁵ Garber is chair of Harvard's Visual and Environmental Studies department and may not strictly see herself as a sociologist. But she writes influentially about social phenomena.

⁶ *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*, by Douglas Stone, et al, 2010.

27. **A net gain, even with risk-taking** - Reactions to norm-breaking wax unpredictable. The majority is willing to let their own crazies act on their behalf, in response to out-of-bounds behavior.
28. **A part of my natural leadership style** - I am a servant-leader, probably because this was taught to me in church.
29. **A proof of sexual diversity at Rose** - We need obvious examples of diversity to bring home the fact that it's really here.
30. **Framing lives in academia** - Should Dilbert's cube be the main influence on young software workers' values?
31. **The designer's prerogatives** - What do you wear for invention? -- Designers shouldn't play by the same rules as for stamping out parts.
32. **A chance to experiment with bias** - I've analyzed course evaluations for classes I've taught over a long time - students do really rate people lower who are different.
33. **Specific support for cross-dressers** - We've had several, and they have gone on to good jobs and grad schools.
34. **A set for academic change** - I do this when I help run our MACH conference.
35. **A black-and-white alternative** - Engineering is now more competitive, and nuances like appearance matter a lot.
36. **Egotistical poverty** - I work with upper classmen who go head-to-head with external clients who think differently; modesty is a good posture for that.
37. **Building on René Girard** - I disagree we should pretend to be infallible models to our engineering students. Our goal is that students think for themselves.
38. **Employing the double bind beneficially** - We all use double binds to propel learning -- putting our students into situations they can't exit without encountering new and challenging realities.
39. **Proving Gunnar Myrdal was a generalist** - In his 1944 *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Myrdal described the vicious cycle of oppression, in which whites pointed to the position they put blacks into, as proof of blacks' inferiority; this cleverly and subconsciously resolved the conflict between their active persecution and the American ideals of equal opportunity and human rights.
40. **Deconstructing US men** - I need to do this -- Anything sacrosanct requires critical analysis.
41. **A nix on Plato** - He reasoned you have to have opposites to have meaning, and build hierarchies out of them -- an overly aggressive center for Western civilization.