

Mary Troxell
Alpha Sigma Nu Ceremony

I am so honored to be receiving the Alpha Sigma Nu teaching award, and I want to begin by expressing my gratitude for being a teacher at a Jesuit University. Boston College takes seriously its Ignatian mission of educating the whole person, and because of that fact, I am able to participate in reflective discussion groups, Halftime and First year retreats, Capstone classes, and the Arrupe program. In these contexts, I get to see who students are outside the classroom, and that not only informs my teaching, but also makes it more fulfilling.

Boston College also takes seriously the Jesuit dictum to be women and men- people- for others, and I am grateful to teach in the PULSE program, which embodies this phrase and has allowed me to be in fellowship with my students as they try to live out this charge. Typically, in a philosophy class, the teacher is the focal point of the class. This is because the material tends to be difficult and abstract, and it can only come alive for those encountering it for the first time through an engaging teacher. In PULSE, however, the service takes center stage. Through the texts we read in class, I help guide the students to articulate the deeper meaning of their service, but it is the service that transforms them and the service that they will remember the most. What they learn in their service I learn as well, and thus I have the opportunity to be both student and teacher. The structure of PULSE allows me to meet with my students for an entire year, and that allows me to get to know them- and more importantly, for them to get to know each other, so we can form a genuine community.

Teachers often hear about the impact they have on their students, but I am not confident that students know the profound impact they have on their teachers. I certainly wasn't aware of this when I was an undergrad. Thus I want to spend the rest of my time up here describing some of the ways students have had an impact on me. When I started teaching, wasn't aware that my students would help me stay in what is now termed a growth mindset. F. Scott Fitzgerald, wrote that when we are 18, [our convictions are hills from which we look](#); when we are 45 they are caves in which we hide. I get to spend my work hours with students who are standing on hills- they are willing to be bold in interrogating their convictions. Accompanying students at one of the most exciting times of their lives- when they are figuring out who they want to be and how they want to live, inspires me to live the passion of my convictions. My students also challenge my convictions and my assumptions, which is difficult and humbling, but also enormously valuable.

College students are also eager to discover new things, and they expose me to new music, new books, and even new cool sayings- you all slay, by the way- which reminds me of all there is still to discover in the world. Sometimes their new experiences include a newfound love of philosophy, and I get the pleasure of reliving my experience of falling in love with it 40 years ago.

My students have transformed me into a more hopeful person. I specialize in Schopenhauer, the philosopher of pessimism, so this is no easy task. My PULSE students, specifically, give me hope because of their capacity for goodness. It isn't easy taking the T, which breaks down with a consistency that feels deliberate. It isn't easy being fully present at service in the midst of

continuous midterms and miserable weather. It isn't easy entering into a community that perhaps doesn't always welcome you, or that humbles you, or that challenges everything you thought you knew about fairness, or justice, or what makes a good society. The generosity and compassion that my students over the years have demonstrated in service to others feels miraculous to me, and it never stops feeling miraculous to me. Because of my students, I feel hopeful that there is sufficient goodness in this broken world.

Finally, my students teach me a great deal about love, and that has been transformative. Another reason I am grateful to teach at Boston College is because love is not an embarrassing word in the context of teaching. Fr Michael Himes, one of my teaching heroes, said that teachers should love who they teach, love what they teach, and introduce the two to each other, Pope Francis described teaching as an act of love. I love what I teach, and I also grow to love my students over the course of the year. That may be the greatest gift that they, you, have given me.

I am so blessed to be a teacher- thank you.