Popular Bridgeport Professor Delivers Broad Expertise

BRIDGEPORT, Conn. -- Dr. Peter Umoh’s official title at the University of Bridgeport is Professor of Philosophy and Religion. However, the job description only scratches the level of his expertise.

Umoh, who has worked at Bridgeport since 2006, incorporates concepts from philosophy, religion, English, social studies, history, sociology, psychology and more into his methods. He delivers content in his lectures with a mix of humor and seriousness, and seemingly knows when to flip the switch at a moment’s notice. He particularly enjoys teaching in UB’s IDEAL Program, which caters to adult students.

“The more varied it is, the more I feel at home,” Umoh said. “I have a very broad background. Having that allows me to hit the major points in a three-hour lecture. I think the students walk away with the understanding that we don’t live in a homogeneous society. Everything is connected.”

Umoh likes to connect those dots in his lectures. Like the kinetic chain in anatomy, Umoh teaches with the theory that concepts in all of his areas of expertise are intertwined.

“It’s all about making connections and pulling them together,” said Umoh, who is one of the most popular teachers at UB. "That’s how students become a ‘learned’ person. They’re able to make connections without even realizing they are doing so.”

Umoh, a native of Nigeria, comes from a teaching family. His father was a principal and teacher, and his sister teaches in Nigeria. “When you’re the son of a teacher, it’s like being a military brat,” he said. “You learn indirectly. Teaching for me flows effortlessly.”

Umoh has been listed in Who is Who Among America’s Best Teachers several times. In 2010 he was voted in as Instructor of the Year at University of Bridgeport. His teaching philosophy, he said, is to inspire students.

“I honestly believe all students can learn,” Umoh said. “You have to connect to the background that the student brings to the classroom. It doesn’t matter so much what you’re teaching, it matters that you understand who you’re teaching. The specificity of the content may be the same, but the method of delivery is subject to the environment.”

That may be part of the appeal in teaching students from the IDEAL Program, where a broad cross-section of the population comes together. Some students have prior college education, some do not. Nearly all of them have full-time employment and are pursuing a degree in their spare time.

“They are late bloomers,” Umoh said. “One thing or another interfered with the college process. Now they are mature students who understand the value of the class they are taking. That’s a huge advantage.”

Umoh says he encourages students to draw parallels from their work environment to the classroom. “If you can make that mental connection, you can be a successful student. When they make the connection to the knowledge, it’s like giving the person a set of tools that is proper for the job.”

Umoh said understanding that students learn at wildly different paces is part of the teacher’s responsibility as well. “It’s like a box of chocolates,” he said. “You never know what you’re going to get or how long it’s going to take.”

by Tom Renner

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