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## 'Teaching Naked'



Larry Litwin, APR

"Teaching naked." It's not what you think. It's an innovative and legitimate, but far from new, teaching philosophy. It's a look at the recent past — a throwback. It challenges everything we've come to believe about technology in the classroom. It simply means stripping computers from the classroom, reducing the number of lectures and "forcing" students to participate in intellectual conversation about the day's topic.

### 'Planned Spontaneity'

If there is any question about the advantages of teaching naked, Rowan University public relations major Rhyann Truett has the answer. "While its name may elicit an immature giggle, raise eyebrows or make a student wonder just what they've signed up for, Professor Litwin's teaching naked approach is spontaneous, as if he has no agenda," Truett said. "However, we all know better. He always has a plan."

"The ability to apply material to real life and to teach students what they are curious about at the moment makes Litwin's classes relevant and intriguing," she said. "Unless someone promises you flawless notes, don't miss a class. What you've missed won't easily be found in a textbook because of the spontaneity."

### 'Inverting' the Traditional Teaching Model

The teaching naked philosophy originated at Southern Methodist University with professor and dean of its Meadows School of the Arts, Jose Bowen. Dr. Bowen is quick to assure anyone who will listen that it's a "clean" approach to "invert the traditional [teaching] model" and bring excitement to the classroom.

The concept is contrary to the newest classroom approaches and teaching methods because it replaces both the "smart classroom" as we know it and today's college teaching model — one-way lectures. However, it does not shy away from technology, completely. It combines computers with classroom time. The strategy challenges students to use technology on their own — at home, in a library, at Starbucks or McDonald's, or some other Wi-Fi location — so that valuable classroom time is spent on face-to-face discussion. Not only does this approach help them better understand the topic, it also forces students to speak (rather than text). It helps hone their oral communication skills, along with their thinking and research skills. Students are expected to show up well-prepared for discussion — with attribution. Those using the approach say it is a win-win for both teacher and student.

### 'Buying Into' the Approach

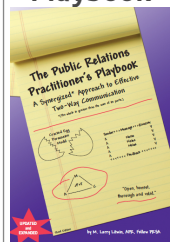
Rowan students, like those at SMU, not only appreciate and enjoy the approach, but have endorsed the "naked classroom," as they are quick to register for these classes at both schools. Once they understand the philosophy, challenges and its accomplishments, students buy into it and spread the word.

"This is the most motivational style of learning I've experienced, because we aren't confined to a set-in-stone curriculum," said Rowan PR major Tyler Mulvey. "I look forward to coming to class after surfing the net looking at videos and illustrations and listening to podcasts, and then being able to ask anything, talk about it, debate with other students and even challenge the professor."

"While it sounds like it's an anti-technology position," SMU's Bowen said on the National Public Radio *Weekend Edition*, "really what I'm doing is using technology like podcasts and online games so that students have first contact with the material before they come to class."

Another Rowan public relations major, Michael Baratta, offered this observation: "Professor Litwin throws the typical lesson plan out the window and covers real-life examples, which teach students what to expect once

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they enter the workforce. From firsthand experience, students seem to retain more of what is taught rather than with a classic from-the-book lecture.”

As an example, Baratta cited classroom discussions during the early days of the Penn State sexual abuse scandal. “All of us agreed, through emotional and passionate discussions and what we had learned about communication, that Penn State earned an ‘F’ in crisis communication,” he said. “Dr. Bowen and Professor Litwin truly believe students want to be there,” said Truett. “Because we are ready to learn, they incorporate whatever inventiveness is needed to teach us and engage us.”

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### Focusing on Critical Thinking and Discussion

On the college or high school level — even middle and lower grades — Dr. Bowen’s teaching naked approach can and does work. Whether in a large lecture hall or smaller classroom, the fact presentation-regurgitation method just doesn’t cut it any longer. Teaching naked encourages students to think critically and strategically, improves their problem-solving skills and engages them. Students’ term papers and their new-found desire for classroom participation prove that the latest technology still has a place in the teaching process, but so does interpersonal, verbal communication.

Larry Litwin, APR, Fellow PRSA, is associate professor of public relations/advertising in Rowan University’s graduate School Public Relations program. He has served two school districts as public information director and spent 10 years at CBS-owned KYW Newsradio in Philadelphia as its education reporter. He is the author of NSPRA’s resource book, *The Public Relations Practitioner’s Playbook*, which is available for purchase on the NSPRA website at [www.nspr.org](http://www.nspr.org).

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