

Teaching Philosophy Statement

I view my class as an experience—responsive, dynamic, and process-based learning that enables a more personal and authentic understanding of my established learning outcomes. The meaning my students and I make of this experience is neither entirely up to them nor entirely up to me. Each semester, it is something we must develop together anew. Because my pedagogical approach is a collaboration between teacher and students, I believe students must understand my approach. Therefore, I speak early and often to my students about how the journey we are on leads to them being competent, empathic, and impactful leaders in their respective fields. They learn about some of the different ways of teaching and learning and how my lens leads both me and my students out into the community where I ask them to apply their knowledge actively, reshaping their worldviews. I guide my students to engage critically with everything they learn so that when they graduate and go into their chosen professions, they will do so without harming the people and communities they seek to help. Many enter my classroom only to satisfy an academic requirement but by the time the course concludes this “do no harm” approach is a shared commitment. For both me and my students, service grounded in academic expertise empowers us to make the world better.

Because many of my students begin as exploratory students but end up choosing careers in social work and counseling, my pedagogical approach aims to promote transfer from education to practice. I encourage introspection as we delve into topics on human development that touch on the full spectrum of humanity. As a result, my curriculum has an interactive, transformative design and includes methods and materials that are intended to prepare students for both helping professions and graduate degree programs. Often, I rely less on PowerPoint presentations of notes and more on dynamic student-centered lectures, activities, and discussions. Respectfully and with concern for the neurodiversity in the room, I encourage students to critique and explain topics, demonstrating leadership and breadth of knowledge. I want all my students to be trauma-informed, civic minded and racially literate, and I help them to build this lens as we connect theory with practice. I commit to incorporating this broader lens in how I design all my courses (from the design of the syllabus and the selection of learning materials to the examples used during discussion and the co-curricular opportunities I cultivate and share).

Students in all my classes are encouraged to explore their own personal values, beliefs, and behaviors, and contextualize them with related research, giving them the opportunity to display cultural competence. For instance, we do not just consider the symptomatology of a disease or the demographic characteristics of a community. We move beyond that to consider such topics through a wider view of the people and communities that are affected and how our own racialized, gendered, and classed representations of people and communities contribute to how we experience the topics. I actively look for what biases, unconscious or conscious, are stoked, and work to help my students build the skills to move beyond them. A classroom is not culturally safe because students are with people with whom they agree; it is culturally safe because it allows for growth, introspection, and viewpoint diversity. Therefore, my students are taught that they need not agree with me to succeed; they need only to agree to engage in a process of critical- and self-reflection as we move through the nuances of complicated subjects and materials.

Pushing students in the ways described above is only successful because of additional efforts to make sure my students feel *seen* and *heard*. Thus, good and consistent feedback is an important aspect of my teaching practice. My high academic expectations (which I communicate regularly through my grading, my evaluative comments, and the general feedback infused into my course lectures) can intimidate students. There are many assignments and the rubrics provided require students to be thoughtful in unexpected ways. Moreover, I want my students to appreciate that topics like patriarchy, misogyny and sexism are not weapons that I wield against them or against members of particular demographic groups, but rather opportunities for us all to participate in critical reflexivity. I believe that my students know that they are never under attack in my class because of my efforts to provide feedback that validates them. I am aware of the teacher to student power dynamics in a classroom, and it is with a sense of ethics and moral responsibility that I do not label my students or relate to them based on an identity I have assigned to them. I am careful not to reinscribe some of the structures and institutions that I critique in my courses. When I offer an analysis of their words, the goal is not to discredit them; it is, instead, to give them tools and opportunities to express themselves more clearly. Therefore, my students learn that my feedback (much of which is qualitative and intended to help students to process improvement) is a part of a larger relationship I form with them. Overall, the opportunity Penn State provides to explore intersections between my research, scholarship, teaching, and service is a precious gift. It is with profound gratitude that I pass that gift on to my students.