

**Jill M. Wood**  
**Teaching Philosophy**

I am deeply committed to the University as a site of education to inform social change. For this reason, I believe that education is a process in which students can be empowered as agents of social justice work. Since issues of power, control, oppression, and freedom are at the center of the subject matter in my courses, learning is a potentially empowering and transformative experience. My role as an educator has been shaped by the work of educational theorists, such as Paulo Friere, and feminist pedagogues, such as Adrienne Rich and bell hooks, who share a similar recognition of the power of education. My passion for teaching is rooted in the belief that true learning inescapably empowers learners to be agents in their own lives. I am intentional in my teaching style, in that my teaching practice is informed by my pedagogical praxis.

Logistically, my teaching practice involves three simultaneous processes. First, I create a classroom atmosphere in which students feel valued and respected, and where learning is accessible to students' diverse needs. Next, my teaching involves the transfer of information and skills to and from students through a variety of avenues, including assigned class readings, lecture, small or large group discussion, class projects, activities in class, service learning projects, the use of films and social media, and guest speakers. In my student-centered classroom, student participation and discussion is a primary way that we learn from one another as students are not only learners, but also teachers. Because students expect to participate in both the teaching and learning processes, they arrive prepared to class, bringing their own contributions, experiences, knowledge, and belief systems. In this way, the classroom is a fluid site of knowledge acquisition and production as students, through newly learned critical thinking and writing skills, evaluate the implications of new perspectives and knowledge. Finally, my teaching includes an element of self-reflexivity; I am continually evaluating, developing, and re-implementing my teaching methods. I use formal and informal routes to invite feedback from students to understand their experience of learning in our classroom. Anonymous student feedback, collected every 4 weeks in class, is just one way that I am able to learn how successful students feel in our classroom. Students' submitted work provides me with another set of data to assess students' learning with regards to my educational goals and objectives. In this way, my timely and extensive feedback on students' work enables me to not just evaluate their learning over the course of the semester, but it also provides me with numerous opportunities to dialogue with students about their learning process while I simultaneously reflect on my teaching strategies.

Many students in my classes struggle due to institutionalized forms of oppression, lack of privilege, and systematic forms of disenfranchisement. This requires a teaching practice that evolves based on students' changing emotional positions. My feminist classroom is situated within the context of students' challenging lives. After teaching undergraduates at Penn State for over 15 years, I am struck by the fragility of students (especially within the last few years) with regards to how they arrive, emotionally and mentally, to my classrooms. An increasing number of students are so incapacitated by personal tragedy and/or their inability to cope with their personal lives that I describe them as living in the margins; that these students are at routinely at max capacity in terms of their ability to act in their lives. Notably, how we understand the experience of students at the margins is paramount to how we consider future directions in terms of pedagogical practice. Whether I am teaching in the classroom, via a web-based course, or leading a pedagogy workshop, I employ a feminist ethics of care and a pedagogy of empathy to inform my teaching. A feminist care-based model of teaching considers the strengths that students bring to class in terms of their personal experience, acknowledging a student's lived experience as a specific epistemological stance. In this way, a student's experience is considered a valid way of knowing and the context in which students learn, including the context of their lives, is considered an important aspect of their situated knowledge. This approach to teaching necessitates the addition of care work into one's teaching practices, and in doing so the classroom becomes an accessible learning community that values students' lived experience and location. I care deeply for and about students, and I tell them this verbally on the first day of class, it is included in my syllabi, and I show them through our interactions that I truly value them as both students and as individuals. Part of this care ethic also holds students accountable for their work, requiring them to do their best work for my courses, while providing them with information, skills, resources, and positive feedback when they succeed. In this way, my teaching is an intricate balance between practice and praxis, and I consider the charge to teach very seriously given the profound possibilities that education holds for students, their lives, and all of our futures.