

## Cheryl L. Nicholas Teaching Philosophy

While different courses offer different needs and goals for the student, instructor and program, I focus on three things: 1) learning the essential skills/course material, 2) application of those skills/ intellectual knowledge learned in the classroom to relevant areas of life, and 3) developing critical consciousness. As a teacher, my goal is to maintain a strong balance between strict guidelines that guarantee high academic standards on one hand, and fluid strategies designed for each learning situation on the other. There are different ways of learning. As such, when I first develop a course or begin teaching a class, I always take a reflexive stance around the course objectives: I evaluate the value of the course to the students as well as what would be possible to achieve in the classroom both as a teacher and as a student. I combine various pedagogic engagements (e.g. lectures, workshops, focus groups, experiential learning, media presentations and simulations) to keep the flow of information exciting and stimulating. I find that this incorporation of different instruction styles also helps increase student motivation for classroom participation.

Knowing students on a one-to-one basis has significant impact on students' classroom experience. I also work with students outside of the classroom, through extensive office hours and assignments that require office visits. I find the information gathered from interactions with students useful as it helps me attend to and gauge student needs and performance. I use these meetings as formative evaluations, that is, to get feedback regarding the course and its efficacy. I see these meetings as opportunities to improve the course. While I stress personal attention, I also emphasize balance, as it is important not to have the familiarity with students compromise teacher-student respect.

Part of my pedagogic strategy involves helping students think about/prepare for a future beyond their undergraduate degree. Students should be aware that each life path (be it in industry or further education) involves proper preparation. This does not mean that students should ever be discouraged from a goal they might have but rather that they learn about the systems within which they might operate in the future, and what they might need to develop to find satisfaction in their goals. Students tend to do well when they can apply information learned in class to their day-to-day experiences. As such, I find it vital for instruction to operate in the intersection of theory and practice. This can be done either by finding practical examples to help explain concepts or by assigning a practical exercise with a theoretical direction. My course assignments are usually designed to support applied contexts and situations, along with critical assessment.

One of my main goals in the classroom is to help students develop critical consciousness as part of their education, so that students can be better participants/citizens in their communities. In my instruction, I incorporate Freirean<sup>1</sup> ideas of "conscientization" wherein I critically address "constructed realities" and hegemonies of race, class, and gender. Through the process of conscientization, we can come to understand how each individual and community has the power to resist imposing ideologies or hegemonic social structures. When incorporated with practice, I find critical consciousness to be an empowering experience for most students.

In this teaching statement, I demonstrate how my teaching philosophy is based on the balance of instruction, practical application, and critical consciousness. Certainly, as a teacher I also strive to keep up with the theory and research associated with the course. I have a fervent passion for teaching and helping students develop their full intellectual potential. I feel that this passion, along with my teaching goals can make education a rewarding journey for both, my students and me.