

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY—KARA STONE

A student once told me that I listen to and believe in students' ideas more than anyone she had ever encountered. She said coming to my classroom was the best form of "self-care" because no matter what else was going on in the world, I had a natural ability to put everyone at ease and make them feel safe. Her words resonated with me because I strive to create a classroom environment where everyone feels appreciated and valued. My teaching philosophy is based upon connecting with students on their terms, making them feel heard, empowering them to listen to others, and then challenging them to achieve their personal best. My goal is for my students to find the agency they need to communicate and write effectively and to use their voices to help others. This instructional philosophy is based upon understanding students' goals by taking a unified approach in my instruction, engagement, and service to help them to achieve their goals through teaching them critical thinking, persuasive writing, independent research, and professional competency.

Each semester, I apply my philosophy of student engagement and inclusion to my instruction of English 15 and upper-level courses. I take pride in my commitment to an engaged learning environment by offering a multisensory approach. I accomplish this by offering different in-class and at-home assignments to fit the needs of multiple learning styles, while remaining cost-effective by using materials readily available, such as news articles, and being realistic about deadlines since students are juggling multiple responsibilities. I also incorporate music, art, and social media into discussions of literature. When reading medieval or classical texts, I encourage students to invest in the course through contributing to a class playlist by uploading a song along with a response essay that argues for how the song relates to a theme or scene. My passion for teaching and guiding students is illustrated through my integration of texts that highlight current social issues that inspire my students to become advocates for change and leaders in their communities. I purposely choose assignments and readings that push students to think outside of their comfort zones and teach them to question their ideas, as well as others, while simultaneously learning to create logical arguments.

I adopted many pedagogical practices from teachers that inspired me such as use of the Socratic method, student-led discussion, short online writing prompts, and peer-review activities. In addition to modeling an inclusive and nurturing approach to class discussion, my ability to find the right questions to lead my students' academic discovery is the cornerstone of my teaching philosophy. I am a lifelong learner and find my students influence and direct my ongoing instructional improvement. I check in with students weekly through questions in class, emails, or surveys to assess that they are "with me." I use this feedback to shape the rest of the course and revise my syllabus regularly depending on my students' needs by making sure they comprehend the material before moving forward. I also attend professional development workshops to improve my teaching and stay current with best practices through conference attendance. Teaching is my passion, and I cannot think of another occupation where I would have so great of an impact on young minds.

Engaged and inclusive scholarship is also a component of my service. I consistently work with students by helping them pursue their own research and professional goals as an advisor and as an organizer of the undergraduate research fair. I have helped guide students through the research and presentation process through class instruction and individual mentoring. Students often tell me that their favorite part of college was participating in research and that I gave them the courage and preparedness to present their ideas. I regularly include research presentations in class, and I scaffold questions into assignments to build students' confidence about having an opinion on an author's work, including their peers, so they know how to respond to questions. In doing so, they learn that one of the best ways to develop persuasive writing styles is to imitate other writers or presenters that successfully persuaded them.

My students come from various socioeconomic backgrounds, with differing academic needs and interests, who all have succeeded in my classroom because I subscribe to the teaching philosophy of creating an environment of inclusion and engaged learning. As I look to the future, I plan to continue my impact as an engaged scholar and active listener who supports students by encouraging their development and preparing them for the outside world. When I advocate for students, give them attention, and care about their progress, I have found they have a greater chance of wanting and achieving success, and they are more likely to succeed with me, and in turn, help others succeed in the process.