

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind. ~ Khalil Gibran

In the summer of 2021, I showed students raw footage of early protests from the Syrian revolution in the streets of Homs. Students were fascinated by the revolutionary slogans being chanted as Syrians emerged from their silence and developed their own rhetorics of resistance. The discussion afterwards was rich, as students debated how they saw themselves in these protests whilst being attentive to local histories and specificities. Though I always prioritize issues facing society, this discussion symbolizes the critical engagement with lived experiences, social justice, and transnationalism which informs my teaching. One of the fundamental purposes of education is not only to enable a deeper understanding of the concepts at hand, but also to enhance intellectual curiosity about the world “out there.” Rather than viewing pedagogy as a one-way transmission of expertise from teacher to student, I believe in a student-centric paradigm in which students are the most integral part of the pedagogical process. Pedagogy is not as an end goal, but rather a facilitation of the life-long process in which students “learn how to learn.”

In consideration of the above, I have two overarching learning goals when I teach. The first is to develop students’ intellectual character through a stimulating learning environment. This is primarily through active learning components which expand their horizons, instead of just a simplistic regurgitation of concepts. Activities could be as simple as observing individuals in natural settings and then reporting on what is witnessed. Other times, I draw on my media and rhetorical studies background to design thought-provoking group activities, such as conduction of interviews, role-playing exercises, debates, and discussion leaderships. Regardless of content, students are emboldened to translate concepts raised in class to ones innately relevant beyond the academy. They leave with skills they can use in the substance of their lives - most important of which is a discerning mind and a problem-solving attitude.

Secondly, I aim to foster students’ analytical thinking abilities and communication competencies. For instance, I strongly believe the process of writing is an empowering instrument in inspiring students to contemplate the issues at stake. It also is invaluable to acquiring intimate knowledge of the material and learning how to elucidate their arguments. Students may be asked to write an autobiographic paper, engage critically on a certain topic, or journal their experiences. Constructive feedback is shared throughout as students create a cogent “thought-language” and arrive at incisive claims. As they inevitably face limit-situations, I coach them through how to overcome any fetters or sense of helplessness. The result is that students gain insight into what they have learnt and are challenged to reflect on their own situationality. With this ‘tool box,’ they can tackle any task they may face in the workplace or in civic life.

I believe it is crucial to continuously incorporate multiple pathways through learning materials through dialogic teaching practices. As such, I adapt my teaching methods to account for varying student needs and abilities, whilst bringing my own knowledge to permit particular angles of questioning and inquiry. Aside from using a variety of audio-visual learning materials, be it documentaries, journalistic pieces, tweets, popular culture, or protest “footage,” students are given flexibility in how they undertake assigned projects. For example, when teaching Intercultural Communication, students are given the option of selecting where they would like to spend their allotted time for service-learning, or in my Communication Research Methods seminar, students select topics that pique their interest while being invited to think about how they might approach the topic from a communication perspective.

When all is said and done, I genuinely care for and appreciate my students as thinkers and conscious beings. As Paulo Freire says, “the teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students” (Freire, 1968, p. 53). So far, I have been grateful for the wonderful student evaluations I have received during my teaching career. I was honored to receive an award for One of Top 50 Teachers in Lower Division Courses for 2019 Academic Year at the University of Memphis. Recently, I was awarded the John Angus Campbell Award for Excellence in Teaching (April 2021), our department’s top teaching award. This has all cemented my passion for teaching as a profession. Above all, I am committed to my students, their quest for learning and their personal and intellectual flourishing.