

## —Statement of Teaching Philosophy—

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In my classroom teaching, I strive to equip students with the resources to value their own ideas and those of others, to appreciate the various genres through which others communicate, and to craft their arguments in the forms most appropriate to their message. I help my students reach these goals through a combination of course content and assignment structure.

This philosophy of education has grown from a life-long commitment to tutoring writing. Over nearly a decade of tutoring and administration in writing centers, I have repeatedly encountered students coming to the writing center pleading for someone to “fix” their grammar or their paper structure. For international students, the desire was to ostensibly hide their foreignness so that their work would be acceptable in the U.S. academic system. Students from diverse backgrounds and experiences often arrived estranged from academic discourse for various reasons. For many of them, academic writing seemed incredibly daunting—it was, perhaps, something they felt permanently excluded from due to their written “accent.” As a tutor, I knew that fixing grammar was not the first priority, and that improving writing comes from a deep engagement with the foundations of genre, whether it be an argument-driven essay or a scientific lab report. It was often difficult to convince students of this since the stakes for meeting academic writing standards were so high.

In my courses, it is thus a major concern of mine that students see U.S. academic standards as learnable and manageable generic expectations, and not an inherent talent or essential national/linguistic trait. In my composition class directed at students for whom English was a nonnative language, I assigned a set of related assignments, including a personal reflection, an issue proposal, a literature review, an analytical synthesis, and a final argumentative paper. As students progressed through the sequence, they were able to focus on a single idea and to see their growth throughout the course. In addition, through a multiplicity of assignments, they were able to see the variety of writing forms available to them, to understand that some information is best revealed in certain genres and left out of others, and to destabilize the notion of the argumentative essay as the one privileged form of academic discourse.

While I acknowledge that students need to master the skills of academic argumentation, I believe that a multiplicity of discourses is among the best strategies to do so in a diverse classroom. Valuing only one type of writing and argument privileges those that have grown up within the cultural milieu that supports the tradition. Challenging old hands to rethink the standards to which they adhere can take place in the same classroom with students who are just learning to adapt to these standards. Ultimately, diversity in assignments and content helps to put the class on a more equal footing, destabilizing notions about who is “good at” writing. This approach has particularly informed my courses in literature and ethnic studies, as it allows for diversity of expression, rather than simply relying on the ethnic identity of the author or performer. By putting literature in comparative context with visual and performance arts, students learn multiple ways to have their say about the world around them.

In order to decenter academic discourse, I make every effort to also decenter my position as an authority figure in the classroom. While I am ultimately responsible for assessing their progress

and maintaining a rigorous atmosphere, I urge my students to take charge of their own learning. I model a practice of inquiry that can contribute to making them more thoughtful, empowered, understanding, and generous learners in all their future endeavors. In order to encourage this, I let my students' observations and interests guide the discussion. This way, although I may not cover all of the material I have prepared for the day, I accomplish something more important: I foster an environment where active inquiry and curiosity drive the shared acquisition of knowledge. One of my favorite strategies is to assign student-led presentations that are followed by class discussion stemming from the students' own interests. The outcome of this approach is expressed in a student's evaluation of my role as an instructor in my upper-level Women and World Literature course: "I liked that she clearly had plenty of topics and information prepared but would also follow our discussion if it went somewhere else...She made us all feel like we were just as good of analyzers/readers of the texts as she was, she just had a little more knowledge of them." This comment encapsulates two of my core goals as an educator: to empower students to take charge of their own education and to give them the confidence to see the value in their own ideas.

When students gain confidence in their ability to choose the forms most appropriate to express their ideas, they can become internally motivated to learn. In such a system, they are driven by seeing evidence of their own progress, rather than simply getting a good grade. To encourage this phase of intellectual growth, I include process writing in my courses. For example, in my course on American Standup Comedy, I assigned regular written homework responses that addressed difficult theoretical concepts in our readings. I then asked students to incorporate their responses into our essay assignments. Doing so provided students with tangible evidence that they had moved from conceptual understanding to critical application. Beyond the grades assigned, students became invested in their own intellectual progress. As a student wrote in an evaluation of that course, "It was easy to work hard because I had a legitimate desire to learn in this class." Realizations such as this point to the development of a life-long enthusiasm for learning and growth that is internally motivated.

This philosophy, stemming from one-on-one, peer-to-peer interaction, ultimately leaves me with a sense that my students' experience in the classroom is just one node in their complicated lives. While I cannot hope to know all of their histories, I can model a classroom practice that allows them to actively express, apply, and gain knowledge in the ways that most empower them in and outside the classroom. At first, I was surprised by an evaluation from my course on Science Fiction and the Cold War that describes me as "that rarest of professors, one who knows her students exist outside of class." But I now understand it to reflect a central tenet of my teaching philosophy: my classroom is but one shared space in my students' diverse experiences, and my role as an instructor is to help foster the confidence, perspective, and skills to best equip them in their own existence outside of class.