Yeonwoo Kim

Teaching Statement

I believe it is important to use the classroom to connect theory, scientific research, and practice. One way I achieve this is to make every other class meeting an experimental space where students can apply what they learned in the previous class meeting to social work practice using their own words. My teaching goal is to help students understand and implement theoretical and scientific derived practices in an environment which includes activities both inside and outside the classroom. I implement a variety of teaching methods such as peer teaching, using an online conversation system, creating and practicing imaginary scenarios for a specific application, and reflective discussion to give students the needed tools for making the application.

First, peer teaching reinforces each student’s learning as they instruct others using their own words. As an example, in the Social Work Statistics course, students role play as a statistical consultant working for a social service agency. They each design a 20-minute class in their own way using applied examples of what they learned in previous class meetings. I demonstrate solid examples of the 20-minute class – such as, lecture, poster presentation, and group work – in the first three classes for students unfamiliar with public presentation. While preparing for their own 20-minute class, each student meets with me individually so that we can co-design the class tailored to the student’s interest and I can gain a better understanding of the students’ strengths. I then incorporate what I learned as I develop the following weeks’ classes.

I bring considerable research experience to my teaching approach. Students not only learn effective interventions are evidence-based, but also what kind of theoretical and scientific knowledge count as evidence. A pre-course assessment I conducted for my Social Work Statistics course revealed many students were anxious about statistics. I developed a “virtual buddy” online conversation system to use in research-focused courses in order to improve students’ abilities to apply scientific or theoretical knowledge to their social work interventions in a range of practice settings. The virtual buddy system allowed students to post two examples of application of each analytic method (one in daily life and the other in social work practice). They clicked a “like” button to indicate their favorite among the examples similar to being on Facebook. For example, a student posted “comparing the average number of chocolate chips in a Chips Ahoy cookie with that in a Chips Deluxe cookie” as a daily-life example of independent t-test and received many “likes” from classmates. Using learning management software like the virtual buddy gave students an opportunity to apply statistics to the problems of daily life and understand clinical practice from a statistical approach.

Bridging the gap between classroom and practice requires accurate means of assessment. I use strength-based rather than deficit-based assessments because students learn theories and scientific research skills more effectively in an encouraging environment. For example, in my Social Work Statistics course, their statistical knowledge was rated based on the three domains
where they received the highest score among multiple-choice exams, using a statistics software program, reflection paper, group presentation, peer teaching, and online participation.

Strength-based assessments require not only an encouraging climate but also a physically and emotionally safe climate so that students can be empowered to learn with a positive disposition, engage in survivable risk, and express their positive change. Students are encouraged to have out-of-class conversations with me. This enables me to better understand any personal struggles they share and to support them as they go through a learning curve. Considering challenges that I experienced as a non-native speaker, I also use diverse learning activities online, in writing assignments, and in class to enable culturally oppressed or introverted students to have equitable engagement opportunities. Finally, analyzing anonymous one-minute written feedback from my students regarding my teaching methods, course materials, and learning activities enables me to build a more inclusive learning climate.

I encourage students to approach social work from an evidence-based perspective by assessing theoretical, research-based, and statistical skills. Developing scientific evidence will help students/future social workers persuade lawmakers, government/public funders, health insurers, and other stakeholders as they endeavor to challenge structural barriers and advocate on behalf of oppressed populations. My teaching approach can be used in theory- and research-focused courses such as “Social Work Research Methods,” “Social Work Statistics,” and “Human Behavior and Social Environments” and applied courses such as “Health and Education Disparities and Policy” and “Community Practice for Improving Child Health.”