Teaching Philosophy
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My philosophy as a teacher is to foster growth in my students through building a strong foundation for social work that mirrors the social work mission to serve and empower individuals, families, and communities while encouraging students to gain tools that can be applied in other areas of their lives. My 5 years of experience as a clinical social worker have greatly informed my teaching in the social work courses. I consider teaching to be a collaborative learning partnership between the instructor and the students. Together, we try to recognize and understand the differences in learning styles, educational backgrounds, personal lived experiences, and cultural values, so that course content, learning activities, and teaching strategies accommodate the needs of the class. I recognize that my main areas of focus in teaching are: engagement, collaboration, contribution, safety, and availability.

I believe student engagement is necessary for student success. I consider my role as a teacher to provide students with relatable, stimulating, thought-provoking lessons that will provide such learning opportunities. In order to facilitate analytical critical thinking, I use real case studies to encourage the application of the theory or concepts to real situations. I developed cases inspired from past clients and personal experiences, but also use cases generated in the classroom with the students. For example, in my Generalist Social Work Practice class, we use public figures such as celebrities or movie characters to generate relatable cases. More specifically, after selecting a character from a movie as the client, collectively as a class, we utilize information known from the movie to practice conducting a psychosocial assessment and a treatment plan for the client. Throughout the semester, using these imaginary clients, we practice applying theories and social work concepts. Also, through real-play/role-play exercises students are given an opportunity to mimic real world social work practice. For example, in the Motivational Interviewing class, the real-play exercises allow students to use real-life problems (i.e., I want to lose weight, I want to work on time management) while practicing the motivational interviewing techniques. Students take a turn being the counselor, client and the observer. After providing feedback for each other, students are expected to write a reflection paper processing the real-play exercise.

Cognizant of the ever-changing instructional technology, I regularly incorporate technology-based teaching methods to keep students engaged. Guided by the Just in Time Teaching (JiTTe) method, which promotes learning before and after class to better utilize classroom time, students partake in a before- and after-class activities. For instance, warmups are short online quizzes that students complete before class, prompting students to think about the upcoming class. Based on the responses, this assignment allows the instructor to gauge areas that may need more attention in class.

As I consider student collaboration and contribution to be an important aspect of learning, small group work is a critical component in my classes. Sociocultural Theory of Development emphasizes positive group interdependence, suggesting that synergy amongst group members often produces better performance and learning outcomes, including greater knowledge retention and creative problem-solving skills. Interaction amongst students is thought to optimize the learning process. In my classes, I often utilize informal groups—“thinking pairs”—when I employ the “think-pair-share” method, which allows students to first think about the given assignment on their own, then pair with a partner to discuss the work and to ultimately share the work with the entire class. I also incorporate formal group work in my classes. Students are asked to assemble a group of 3-4 students they will work with throughout the semester. For example, in my Research Methods class, students are in a
semester-long working group as they go through the entire research proposal writing process, which entails picking a topic, conducting a literature review, generating a problem statement, and writing and presenting the proposal to the class. I believe small groups are essential as it enables students to be heard and to hear their peers, while in traditional lecture heavy classes, students may spend more time listening to what the instructor says. Collaboration is not limited amongst students. In order to complete their research proposal project, students are expected to collaborate with members of the community at some point in their project; whether it is by meeting with faculty experts, submitting the final proposal to an undergraduate university research support program, presenting it to community organizers, or by sharing the proposal through a social media platform. Students are also encouraged to actively contribute to class lectures. Students take turns giving a 10-minute mini presentation at the start of each class and lead a discussion of the assigned reading. This increase student awareness of the topics that will be discussed in the lecture.

I make an effort to create a safe classroom environment for my students by encouraging transparency in the classroom. At the start of each semester, I communicate my expectations for the class. I also encourage students to share their expectations for the class, inquire of goals students may have for the particular class, and also ask students to share potential areas of concerns in taking the course. I aim to provide a safe and positive learning environment that equally invites effort, contribution, mistakes, and errors.

In order to further facilitate learning outside of the classroom, I make myself available to students as much as possible. I provide both traditional and online office hours to my students. I am accessible for students to visit with me via video conferencing. I also provide group feedback online via tools like Google Hangouts, which allows video conferencing with multiple users. I also maintain a ‘Return within 24 hours’ email policy to effectively and efficiently communicate with students. To extend my availability, I regularly incorporate web-based teaching methods. Online classroom management systems, such as Canvas are used to share class materials, prompt online discussions, create and manage assignments, and test for understanding.

Guided by assignment rubrics, I objectively evaluate students' understanding of course content. I employ various assessment tools and techniques such as quizzes, case analyses, group presentations, classroom discussions, individual class assignments, homework assignments, and traditional exams to measure student learning. Evaluation includes assessment of my teaching as well. To identify the effectiveness of delivery of the learning material and to examine if learning objectives were met, students submit a 1-minute short assignment at the end of each class. An example of a short assessment includes identification of one thing they have learned in the class. Also, students directly evaluate the instructor during the semester as well. Students are asked to rate my overall teaching style and suggest ways to improve the class.

I believe that knowledge of the basic principles of social work is necessary for students. While I aim to provide a safe platform for learning and developing critical thinking skills, one of my greatest hopes is to develop my students as passionate and astute social workers.