Teaching Philosophy Statement
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Facilitating the development of students to become practitioners and academicians capable of positive social change is my top priority as an educator. I draw on my experiences as a social work clinician and scholar to instill in my students the critical consciousness needed to achieve equity and social justice for the diverse clients they will come to serve. With a social justice lens always underlying my instruction, I emphasize to my students the importance of bridging theory, research and practice. Thus, collaborative learning, skill practice, and critical evaluation of theory, research, policy, and praxis are integral to my pedagogy. Helping the most vulnerable and oppressed individuals thrive through empowerment and social justice is fundamental to the social work profession. My goal is to help my students embody our social work values as they embark on their careers.

I build a foundation of inclusion by inviting each student on the first day of class to introduce themselves and to identify their pronouns. In my classroom, differences in age, race/ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation, for example, are viewed as valuable characteristics that contribute to a rich learning environment. It is important, as a White professor, to expose my students to content that includes historically oppressed and underrepresented groups. I also find it important to highlight accomplishments and social movements of underrepresented groups that have implications for social work policy/practice. One example of how I incorporated diversity in my classroom was presenting a documentary of an African American woman treating urban youth with intellectual disabilities. Following the film, students were assigned to write a response to the film. Specifically, I asked students to identify how their own unique situations influence how they would approach work with the clients in the film. Another example occurred when I had the students apply César Chavez’s work to concepts taught during a unit on social movements. I then asked students to research and identify a social movement that was led by or that affected the racial/ethnic/gender group of which they most closely identified. Because serving diverse peoples is fundamental to social work, I encourage students to share personal insights that strengthen understanding of others’ experiences. In the beginning of the semester, I guide my students through an exercise in which they independently write and reflect on their personal experiences and biases. I then invite the class to discuss how these experiences and biases influence how they approach and perceive specific topics, individuals, and communities.

Realizing that student diversity manifests in countless ways, I implement multiple innovative methods aimed to meet the needs of all my students. All students are expected to participate; however, not all students will regularly speak in class. For this reason, I incorporate online discussion boards for students to discuss topics related to classroom content. I establish assignments for each class a priori; however, I allow students the opportunity to alter their assignments to meet their learning needs and to allow for creativity as long as the alterations adhere to the assignment objectives.

The gap between research and practice remains problematic in the social work profession and is a gap that I challenge my students to close. One of my teaching objectives involves critical application of theory and research to social work practice. Recognizing that research can be intimidating, I provide students opportunities to link research to practice that does not consist of conducting experiments with complicated statistics. Throughout the semester in my Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) class, I had students complete exercises from evidenced-based interventions. For example, during a unit on families, I had the students practice conducting an
exercise from the Circle of Security Parenting intervention. For this in-class activity, students were asked to research and identify the theoretical underpinnings and target population of the intervention, and to role-play the exercise from the viewpoint of both the clinician and the client. Following the activity the students discussed their experience of delivering and receiving the intervention and provided a critique. This activity facilitates student understanding of the link between research and practice by (1) understanding how research and theory are used to inform interventions, (2) critically assessing the utility and appropriateness of interventions for a given population, and (3) gaining insight and empathy for clients by experiencing receiving an intervention. Consistent with my critical approach to pedagogy, students are expected to not only know how to conduct various practice skills, but to understand why they implement any given micro or macro intervention. Students are encouraged to disagree and challenge common practices and when this occurs, I urge students to defend their convictions with theoretical and/or empirical evidence.

I regularly share my experiences of conducting research and implementing evidenced-based practices with past clients. I make it a priority to remain up-to-date on the literature and popular evidenced-based practices that are applicable to the classes I teach. To ensure this, I provide students with current literature and when possible, I invite experts to lecture to my students. For those students interested in research on a deeper level, I attempt to include them in my current research projects or I connect students with faculty conducting research in the students’ area of interest.

Throughout the semester, I evaluate how well my students understand material by assigning group presentations, papers, and in-class and take-home examinations. Students are encouraged to provide drafts of their written assignments to me prior to the due date so I can provide them with detailed feedback on how to improve their paper. Additionally, for each of the two major papers I assigned in my HBSE courses, I scheduled peer review workshops during which students critiqued their partner’s papers and had the opportunity to discuss their papers with either me or the teaching assistant. I reserved time outside of class to meet with and support any student who wished to improve their writing, research, and practice skills.

I also evaluate myself throughout the semester by asking students to provide feedback of my teaching and class content. From the beginning, I urge students to come to me, at any time, if they would like something to be modified or improved. In addition to the required end of semester class evaluations, I ask students to complete anonymous feedback forms at the midterm point of the semester. I take the feedback seriously, and when possible, I immediately incorporate feedback so that I can improve the learning experiences of my current, as well as future, students. For example, I consulted with the university diversity center and incorporated more LGBTQ-relevant content and activities in my class after receiving midterm feedback forms.

As a professor, I want to continue to provide students with the knowledge and experiences gained from working directly with diverse clients. To this end, I am eager to teach clinical courses in addition to research, policy, and human development courses. Given my research interest in fatherhood and parenting, one of my goals is to develop a curriculum on parenting that contains a significant unit on fathering, a topic missing from many social work programs. It is important that I continuously grow as both a scholar and as an educator. I will continue to seek feedback from my students and colleagues as well as take full advantage of on-campus and online teaching resources and opportunities so that I am always working toward inclusive, effective, and innovative pedagogical techniques.