Teaching Philosophy Statement
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Prior to embarking on a career path in social work, I was an educator for students with diverse learning needs in Kindergarten - 12th grade special education settings. Witnessing the onslaught of systemic and interpersonal barriers my students faced on a regular basis awakened my innate desire for social justice and inspired me to pursue a career dedicated to social work. As an educator, I view myself as a guide who outlines a terrain of learning in which students can find the path to empower themselves through knowledge. I am deeply committed to the process of learning, in which students acquire the tools to critically evaluate and reflect upon knowledge that is imparted to them, as well as the skills to develop and pursue their own inquiries. I strongly believe that many of the injustices we encounter in our world can be attributed to a lack of knowledge, whether that is due to inaccessibility, a paucity of diverse voices and experiences, exposure to biased, misleading, or intentionally false information meant to maintain a status quo in which oppression can thrive, etc. As such, the ability to acquire true knowledge is an act of empowerment that can enhance social justice.

As a social work educator, I create a classroom environment where a commitment to social justice and mutual respect are the dominating attributes. I continuously urge my students to use a respectful, strengths-based perspective when faced with ideas and opinions that are novel and challenging. Another part of my commitment to social justice involves working to provide accessible educational opportunities to as many students as possible. This includes a commitment to teaching social work via online and hybrid-based formats. In terms of content, while my focus is on teaching practice courses, my goal is to guide students towards considering all course-related issues from a strengths-based, trauma-informed framework that incorporates micro and macro perspectives. I prompt students to consistently question how issues of diversity, particularly regarding historical forms of oppression, may impact any given situation. To facilitate this, I pose to students a constant challenge: to consider the unknown in every situation – what part of the story is not being told? How might examples of bias, oppression, trauma, or lack of acknowledgement from the dominant cultural framework play into a given situation, and how might these issues manifest at micro and macro levels?

As a practice-oriented social work educator, I maintain ongoing roots in the community by cultivating relationships with local practitioners and by providing pro-bono services on a part-time basis, including clinical neurofeedback sessions and consultations. This allows me to demonstrate my respect for students and their education by providing them with a fresh and up-to-date perspective on social work practice. My respect for students is further expressed by my incorporation of interactive teaching and learning strategies. Rather than view students as passive receptacles of knowledge, I frequently employ active learning techniques that encourage ownership of one’s learning. I make my classes as interactive as possible through group discussions, role play activities, and the use of case vignettes. For example, I recently used a case vignette about a client who refused to seek medical treatment despite increasingly severe health issues to facilitate group discussions about how a history of adversity might have contributed to her reluctance.

I respect students as future social work practitioners by promptly addressing situations where they demonstrate behaviors that would not benefit them in a professional environment or
that are otherwise not congruent with social work values and ethics. These include frequent absences or tardiness, assignments repeatedly being turned in late, refusal to consider different viewpoints, etc. In these situations, I first ask to meet with the student to hear their perspective. Depending upon the situation, I offer appropriate resources as needed. I also ask the student to consider their actions in the classroom as analogous to how they would behave and expect to be treated in return within a professional environment and, most importantly, how such behavior might impact their clients. For example, if a student has difficulty turning in assignments on time, how might they handle working at a child welfare agency where failing to meet strict deadlines for submitting documents could result in detrimental consequences for birth parents attempting to reunite with their children?

I cultivate an environment of mutual respect by encouraging to students to provide me with their own feedback. For example, at the end of one of my recent classes, I incorporated a brief written exercise allowing students the opportunity to bring up any issues they had with my instructional approach. To encourage honestly while acknowledging the power differential between an instructor and students, the feedback was anonymous, and I had students drop their papers in a box for me to read later on. Overall, I received positive feedback, including statements such as “you care about students and whether we learn” and “keep doing activities, it makes it more interesting.” I will continue to use this exercise at multiple time points during the Social Work Practice with Groups course I am teaching this semester. When appropriate, I will acknowledge any critical feedback at the beginning of the next class. I am committed to learning from these situations and making changes where necessary to create an environment that is inclusive and welcoming for all students. I also demonstrate mutual respect in my own evaluation of students and their learning. I offer review sessions before any major tests or exams. I also lay out clear guidelines and expectations for assignments and grading policies, and I continuously revisit these topics with students throughout the semester during class. I provide regular office hours and will accommodate other requested meeting times with students to discuss anything that is unclear, and I encourage them to discuss their grades with me if they have any issues in that regard.

Finally, I cultivate respect for students by encouraging them to talk with me during office hours, not only about concerns related to class, but about career goals, and other general issues related to the social work profession. I plan to build upon my current experience as a thesis mentor for an undergraduate honors student by offering mentorship to BSW and MSW students interested in social work research. For those considering the possibility of pursuing a PhD later on, I am committed to creating opportunities for them to gain experience as research assistants and co-authors on articles, particularly in the case of students who have traditionally been underrepresented in positions of higher education. Additionally, I intend to provide substantial research and academic career mentorship for PhD students. For students across all levels of social work education, whether they pursue careers in social work research, practice, or policy, it is my sincerest hope that they become empowered through learning and go on to facilitate that empowerment in the lives of others.