

Teaching Philosophy

In the spirit of Robert Frost who once said, “I am not a teacher, but an awakener,” I approach teaching as a co-constructed effort, where, together with my students, we co-create a learning experience. I see teaching as an art where the teacher invites students to take themselves on a learning journey. As an “awakener” of students’ passion and curiosity to pique their interest in learning, I seek to light the spark of academic exploration that exists within them. I feel that the foundation of successful teaching rests on fostering a positive environment for student learning, a diverse array of activities, and personalized attention and devotion to each student’s specific needs, learning styles, and goals.

Creating a safe and inclusive environment is the top priority for enabling students to learn effectively. Academic creativity and critical thinking are fostered when students feel supported and safe to express their own thoughts, even if they are considered bold and unconventional, without fear of repercussions or consequences. In my classroom, given that mutual respect for every class member is assured, everyone is encouraged to freely share their ideas and perspectives. To ensure that everyone has a chance to convey their ideas in class, I use multiple ways to facilitate participation. Students are prompted to freely express their opinions in pair-share activities and class discussions, as well as through anonymous online polls and surveys. I also find that it is critically important to show students that I am available both before, during, and after the class session itself. Throughout the semester, I provide extra support to each student by offering flexible scheduling to see me for one-on-one mentoring sessions during and beyond office hours. They are welcome to ask me questions before or during class, during class breaks, after class, or by email.

My second goal is to create a highly personalized learning environment for students. Each student brings their own strengths, unique abilities, and skills to the classroom, and with sufficient support, every student can achieve their highest potential. Students come from different backgrounds and I strive to create a supporting learning environment that fits every student’s needs and expectations. I familiarize myself with every student before the course officially starts to understand their specific educational goals and what would help accelerate their learning. I send out an introductory email where I will share a little about myself, with a personalized video attached. In this email, I ask each student to send me a note to share their major, career goals, opinions about prior courses they have taken, and topics in this class that interest them most. I ask them to provide any other information they would like me to know, such as any special accommodations they need, their learning habits, and other concerns. Based on this information, I make further adjustments to my course content to better fit the students’ needs and expectations.

Students learn most effectively when the teacher considers their diverse learning preferences. Therefore, I utilize a variety of different approaches to present class materials. Along with interactive lectures in class, students have access to multiple additional visual and auditory sources, which I share with them via Canvas or other electronic portals to help further enhance their understanding of the topic. Multiple options to approach each of my assignments to meet my students’ needs are provided. Whenever possible, they are allowed to choose how they would like to accomplish the assignment. For example, for a theory presentation for Human Behavior and Social Environment class, students can demonstrate their understanding of the theories by working in groups or individually. They have full power to decide how they would

like to approach this assignment such as role play in classroom, making a pre-recorded video of their presentation, or a traditional presentation with slides.

I motivate their learning by creating highly individualized classroom activities where students become active learners through participation in authentic tasks and gain hands-on real-life experience that improves their understanding of the material and develop their critical thinking ability. The goal of these activities is to allow students to tangibly interact with and witness the relevance of abstract concepts, which are difficult to understand through conventional teaching means. For example, in the Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare class, I use literature and multimedia sources as a means of helping students learn about social issues and the lives of community residents. Students are given a list of books and are allowed to pick one that focuses on a social issue that concerns them the most. Students then write a reflection paper about what they have learned from reading the book and present their findings in class.

My international background also adds unique dimensions to my teaching. As someone who has lived in Russia, Vietnam, and the United States, I have an appreciation for global and intercultural perspectives in education. The research literature has demonstrated the value of integrating global cultural lessons with mainstream coursework to engender a sense of responsibility and desire to effect positive social change, both of which are critical characteristics of successful social work practitioners. Due to increasing interconnectedness between countries, it is helpful to provide Social Work students with a global range of information while equipping them with the ability to think critically, as well as comprehend and value a diverse array of cultural viewpoints and traditions.

Teaching is an art, and it requires true authenticity on the instructor's part. Teaching is also a huge responsibility, and I think that teachers should devote their full attention, energy, and spirit to making the classroom as immersive a learning experience as they possibly can. Students respond to the teacher's energy, and engaged and driven teachers lead students to exhibit the same qualities during class. The quest for transformative learning for students is never ending. As an "awakener," I will continually strive to inspire my students to approach learning proactively and diligently through my own continuous self-development and course refinement.