

As an educator my aim is to help students apply what they learn in my courses to the real world no matter their desired career path. I achieve this by 1) creating a classroom environment rooted in mutual respect and understanding while 2) challenging students to think critically and, 3) ensuring that topics are connected to real-world examples and applications.

I strive to create an open and supportive environment to help students reach their full potential. I worked as a case manager for the Collegiate Recovery and Intervention Services at The University of Alabama where I helped students navigate substance use challenges while continuing to be enrolled in school. I have seen first-hand the complicated situations that students may be facing, and how impactful consistent support over the course of the semester can be. One way that I foster a supportive classroom environment is by establishing group norms with students. This is how I started the semester when leading weekly small group discussion sections for *Drugs and Society*, a University of Texas at Austin Signature Course, meant to help introduce freshman students to college-level learning. When the group was comfortable with the final set of norms (e.g., not interrupting one another, making eye contact when speaking), I sent the list to everyone and revisited it periodically to make sure that it still represented what the students wanted. Additionally, I regularly informed students of available university resources and provided substance use harm reduction information as it was relevant to the discussions. These strategies fostered a supportive environment appreciated by students, with one student stating *“Madison was extremely approachable and kind. She was clearly knowledgeable and passionate about the subject, which made me more excited to engage in the content. She always answered questions to the best of her ability and was very understanding.”*

The trust that I built with students while facilitating small group discussion sections for *Drugs and Society* helped to increase engagement throughout the semester. My goal for these sessions was to help students learn the skills needed to navigate conversations on controversial topics. Because I believe that the classroom is a bidirectional learning environment, the students led the discussions and felt safe and empowered to share their honest opinions with one another. During the discussions, I used critical pedagogical techniques by encouraging dialogue and active learning to challenge students to question why they held certain beliefs while maintaining a supportive and respectful environment. Another way I build trust with the students is through the grading process. In all four classes where I have been a teaching assistant, I have seen students’ anxiety surrounding grades. Recognizing this, in the two courses where I was the primary grader (*Drugs and Society* and *Clinical Assessment and Differential Diagnosis*), I aimed to be as clear as possible with my grading process. Before assignments were due, I reviewed my expectations, checked in during class to see if there were any questions about upcoming assignments and made myself available after class for one-on-one meetings with students that requested additional support. After grading assignments, I provided ample feedback to students. I use assignments not only as a check-in of students’ knowledge, but of also my teaching strategies. If many of the students made a similar mistake or got the same question wrong – that was evidence that I did not do my job and that the student should not be penalized. In cases like this, I reviewed the topic again, making space to discuss any misunderstandings. Students responded well to my grading approach, with one student reporting *“Madison was transparent about her grading process and was very approachable when I had questions about the course material. I have nothing but good things to say.”*

Whether students have a goal to work at the micro, mezzo, or macro level, I believe it is necessary for students to have a strong foundational knowledge of all three levels. I use frameworks such as the Political Determinants of Health to illustrate the ways that policies impact individual and community health. This provides students with a tool to use to critically examine policies and their impacts. I have used this strategy at both the undergraduate and doctoral levels during guest lectures on prenatal substance use. At the undergraduate level, I start by level setting on the issue and dispelling common myths by asking students their thoughts and opinions and engaging in an open discussion before overviewing the complex factors that impact someone who is pregnant and uses drugs. At the doctoral level, I again start with level setting and an open discussion before applying theories such as Narrative Policy Theory and Multiple Streams Framework to the issue and diving into the current state of the research showing the impact of the policies on the micro and mezzo levels.

Similarly, it is important to me that students recognize the importance of research and have the necessary tools to interpret research for themselves. I do this using real world examples to show students how research relates to their day-to-day lives. I developed a guest lecture on the role that the media has had on shaping societal perspectives about drug use throughout time for a freshman level course. During this lecture I pull video clips, newspaper headlines, and other media materials from different decades to show what the prevailing narratives at the time were, and then I go through what the peer reviewed research shows compared to what the media is portraying. The goal of this lecture is for students to begin to consider where they seek out and receive information, reinforcing the importance of peer reviewed literature, particularly on topics that will be relevant to their future careers. In another guest lecture that I built for *Social Work Statistics*, a required Bachelor of Social Work course, I use the lecture as an exercise in using research to inform practice. I introduce a problem identified by research (e.g., condom use among high school students), ask students to hypothesize how they would develop a targeted program to improve the identified issue, and then present statistical results on a relevant study and ask students to interpret the results and adjust their hypothesized solution based on what the research shows. This process helps students to understand how statistics may play a role in their future, even if they are not seeking out a research-focused career.

I have received very positive feedback from students, with overall student course evaluation scores ranging from 4.12 to 4.59 (on a scale of 1-5). However, I believe that teaching is an iterative process, and that I always have room to grow and expand. For this reason, I obtained a Teaching Certificate at The University of Texas at Austin to learn how to design courses to be more effective. I continue to learn new ways to engage with students, no matter the class size, to ensure that all students feel like they are an active participant in their learning experiences.

As I move into an assistant professor role, I understand the significant impact I have in students' academic journeys and lives. I recognize that while not all students I teach will go on to become social workers or healthcare workers, the students can apply social work values to their future roles. This is why it is of the utmost importance to me to use a n work lens and continue to foster an environment where students feel comfortable and supported while still ensuring that they are growing and learning relevant skills.