

Teaching Statement | Katie A. McCormick, PhD, MSW

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My teaching philosophy is informed by adult learning theory, social justice pedagogy, and a deep commitment to inclusive, accessible education. **My primary goal** as a social work educator is to facilitate students' personal and professional development so that they are equipped to competently serve marginalized communities, challenge inequitable systems, and advocate for social justice. I accomplish these goals through **four primary strategies**: 1) creating an inclusive learning environment to foster students' engagement and sense of belonging; 2) scaffolding content and assignments to strengthen students' capacity to engage with complex material; 3) incorporating diverse perspectives to challenge dominant narratives and promote students' critical consciousness; and 4) co-creating individualized and experiential learning opportunities.

Rooted in my lived experience as a first-generation college student, my foundational goal as an educator is to **create an accessible and inclusive learning environment** in which students feel a sense of belonging and empowerment. Earning an Advanced Teaching Certificate from UT's Faculty Innovation Center was integral to building my capacity to design courses and lectures that are accessible to all students. Recognizing that students enter the classroom with varying levels of knowledge, confidence, resources, and support related to navigating higher education, I dedicate class time to inform students of on-campus services to support their success, including academic (e.g., writing center, career services) and holistic (e.g., counseling, disability services) resources. I provide individualized accommodations to ensure course accessibility and to support student success amid structural barriers or personal circumstances. For instance, I co-taught *Young People and Drugs*, a virtual synchronous course of 150 first-year students during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, which required a high degree of adaptability, creativity, and intentional pedagogy. I received excellent feedback from students about my flexibility, with an overall rating of 4.6/5. The following comment demonstrates students' appreciation for my approach to teaching: "*Ms. McCormick was very helpful whenever students had questions and made a clear effort to be as accommodating and understanding as possible which was very helpful with the pandemic going on and classes having to transition to an online format.*"

To facilitate student engagement with the course, I lead interactive classes by weaving dynamic activities into lectures to provide multiple means of engagement to be inclusive of students' varying levels of comfort speaking in class. For example, in my lecture *Navigating the Harm Reduction Policy Landscape in Texas*, I engaged students in an interactive exercise where they used PDAPS – a policy mapping tool – to explore policy data and share their insights with the larger group. This format created multiple pathways for engagement, allowing quieter students to interact with the content through the tool at their own pace while giving more outgoing students the opportunity to share learnings via large-group discussion. I also encourage students to take an active voice in shaping their learning by dedicating the last one or two class periods to topics they have expressed a desire to explore further. Incorporating these strategies in the learning environment creates a strong foundation for fostering engagement, promoting meaningful connection, and cultivating a sense of belonging among students.

Guided by Lev Vygotsky's learning theory, I use **scaffolding techniques** with both course content and assignments to facilitate students' learning and enhance their capacity to engage with complex issues. For instance, *Young People and Drugs* course, I organized the first half of course content according to the Bio-Psycho-Social framework which enabled students to learn about the foundational biological, psychological, and social factors of adolescent drug use. Building on this, I dedicated the second half of the course to more complex topics, such as social determinants of health, harm reduction, and drug policy. I also use scaffolding approaches with

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course assignments. For example, in *Young People and Drugs*, I truncated the major course assignment into four parts that built upon one another throughout the semester: a project proposal, a presentation, a paper, and a public impact product (e.g., infographic). This approach required substantial individualized support in the early stages of project development; however, this decreased over time as students progressed through the course and gained self-confidence. Further, through this small group-based project, students strengthened their written and verbal communication skills and grew in their professionalism and collaboration abilities.

Informed by Paulo Freire's critical and social justice pedagogy, I use multiple strategies to **foster students' critical consciousness**. At the outset of a course or lecture, I openly reflect on how my positionality as a white cisgender heterosexual woman shapes my perspectives and experiences. By modeling openness and introspection, I encourage students to reflect on their own positionalities and biases as they engage in in class discussion. I intentionally elevate diverse perspectives by incorporating contributions from BIPOC and LGBTQ scholars and community activists through articles, videos, and podcasts. For example, recognizing my positionality has a someone who has never personally utilized harm reduction services, in my lecture *A Crash Course on Harm Reduction*, I contextualize the concept with a 5-minute video from the National Harm Reduction Coalition which features 15+ community members and advocates sharing firsthand how harm reduction has shaped their lives. This diversifies voices represented in the classroom and grounds abstract concepts in lived experience. I also integrate diverse perspectives by inviting community members with personal or professional experience related to course topics as guest lecturers. In *Young People and Drugs*, I invited a panel of young adults who shared about their personal recovery journeys. Students describe these learning experiences as transformative, noting how they challenge their prevailing narratives and cultivate their capacity to embrace diverging viewpoints – a necessary skill for their future careers.

My teaching experience extends beyond the classroom. As a mentor, I prioritize **co-creating individualized and experiential learning opportunities with students** in which they feel empowered to leverage their lived experiences and professional interests to help achieve their learning goals. In these mentoring relationships, I have supported students' growth by fostering both professional skills (e.g., communication, time management) and academic development, including content mastery and applied research tasks, such as conducting literature reviews and transcribing and coding qualitative data. I have also co-authored peer-reviewed journal articles and co-developed conference presentations with students. Of note, *two of my mentees were recently recognized for their contributions to research – one received a research excellence award, and another was selected as a winner for her oral presentation*. Collaborating with and learning alongside students has undoubtedly strengthened my research and teaching; students have deepened my understanding of research findings, prompted creativity in my teaching methods, and sparked innovative ideas for future scholarly pursuits.

Given my experience, I am **equipped to teach** foundational social work courses, such as social justice and human behavior and the social environment. My practice experience makes me particularly well-suited to teach practice with organizations and communities, theories and methods of group interventions, and social work research. Based on my methodological expertise, I can also teach mixed methods research and program evaluation. I also look forward to one day developing my own course on harm reduction philosophy, policy, and practice or community-engaged research. However, regardless of the specific course, my primary goal as an educator is to cultivate students' personal and professional development so that they are equipped to competently serve marginalized communities, challenge inequitable systems, and advocate for social justice.