
KAITLYN SWINNEY, PHD**Teaching Statement**

My teaching philosophy mirrors a constructivism theory of learning, which places students at an active position within their learning process. For me, this centers around three main goals: a) critically consuming and sharing material, b) engaging in meaningful collaboration of ideas and projects in small groups, and c) applying their knowledge toward relevant real-world problems and situations. As a teacher, I hope to nurture these skills and serve as a guide toward mindful facilitation, directed readings, and thoughtful assessment of learning. I believe teachers have the power to guide students toward an active understanding of complex material, an ability to work with peers in small groups using course material, and to effectively apply lessons taken away from a course to their future careers using a student-centered approach.

In my experience, an effective way to foster critical thinking of material is to expose them to different perspectives, voices, and schools of thought. For example, all courses I have taught have provided material from a variety of sources, such as lectures, readings, group activities, and non-traditional media (e.g. podcasts) to provide students with a breadth of source material on a topic. After engaging in this material, I have created discussions in small groups where students come together in small groups to discuss the material with guided questions I provide to ignite thoughtful discussion. Additionally, I then have student write a reflection essay about what they learned about the concept and material assigned, critiques they have with any of the pieces, and how they could apply this knowledge in their future career paths. This method allows students to learn about a topic, discuss it with their peers, and apply it to their field, which is a valuable tool that encourages lifelong learning.

Almost every profession involves some component of engagement with your peers and supervisors, and I believe it takes practice to learn how to manage the creation and presentation of a final project, whatever form that may take. This also speaks to an important aspect of learning: understanding how others' life circumstances, upbringings, and perspectives may lead them to a wealth of ideas about a subject. To aid students in this practice, I have used assignments where students are grouped together by professional interests and tasked with writing a research manuscript from research question formation to interpretation of results. This activity provided students with opportunities to work together on a shared interest, refine their research topic, design a rigorous study, interpret hypothesized results, and present their work to their class. This personalization of the material has also increased their sense of ownership in their learning, and has led to more energized classroom discussions and presentations. At the end of the course, students learned not only about the course material, but how to work together to create and execute the project, which they will carry with them in future careers.

To encourage students' ability to be assessed on course content using applied methods, I have expanded beyond closed-answer exams. As a teacher, I find great value in understanding that there are often many different routes one can take to get to a solution, so long as the thought process is clearly delineated. I evaluate students in a

way that necessitates using the course material to solve complex issues and topics such as creating open-ended exam questions that require the integration of multiple constructs into cohesive answers, assigning final papers with a choice of topic, and a final project that applies the material toward a problem or scenario they are tasked to solve. I believe this aids students in better understanding the material beyond simple memorization, and helps them to learn new ways of evaluation and application of material.

Through my teaching experiences, I have been able to adapt and refine the activities and methods I've used to cultivate student knowledge and skills they can carry with them throughout their careers. I am dedicated to continuing my learning of new student-centered strategies to reach and engage students, and provide them with the guidance they need to flourish in my course and beyond.