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INTRODUCTION

The philosophy and values that steer my teaching practices are driven by a passion to instill competencies and understanding among scholars in health and social service disciplines to support underserved communities via research or professional practice. The key experiences that have shaped my teaching approach are anchored in guiding research assistants in developing proficiencies in research and lecturing and teaching in academic settings to students and other professional scholars. The single most guiding value that I have developed through these experiences is the importance of accessing students' "why" or personal motivation behind their interest in coursework and material. I strive to achieve this value in my teaching through assisting students to 1) discover connections between scholarly and personal identity, 2) build competence and confidence in scholarship, and 3) nurture independence and autonomy in scholarship.

DISCOVER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SCHOLARLY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

My experiences as a teaching assistant and guest lecturer within undergraduate and master's courses highlight that students who can name a personal stake in course material are more likely to engage with it critically and retain it beyond the semester. In my teaching assistantship within the School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin, I opened each reading discussion session with a brief icebreaker or check-in to lower the barrier to sharing personal connections to the material. This small structural choice signaled students to approach the discussion questions that followed not solely as comprehension checks but as invitations to locate themselves within the material. Related strategies that I implemented were offering a choice of discussion questions for small-group conversations and incorporating mid-semester feedback to make time following discussions to work on final assignment reflection papers. When students were given the choice for discussing a topic that mattered to them personally and opportunity to have their voices heard for how our class time together could be improved, I found they engaged with discussion in more depth and were more willing to voice how the material resonated personally in their final assignment reflection papers. The principle that personal relevance precedes critical engagement has shaped how I approach guest lecturing across disciplinary contexts. Rather than delivering a standardized lesson plan, I tailor content to the specific professional or disciplinary lens my audience already holds so that the material connects to relevance they can immediately recognize. For a guest lecture on cross-tabulation and chi-squared tests in an undergraduate statistics course in the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin, I built the lesson plan around a topic future social work practitioners would be invested in (i.e., bullying in schools) so that the statistical method was presented via a question students already cared about answering. I take the same approach in interdisciplinary guest lectures at a broader level, drawing on social work, biological, public health, and psychological frameworks so that students from different academic backgrounds can each locate their own disciplinary relevance in the material. Across both the classroom and guest lecture settings, I have found that this consistent effort to surface personal and disciplinary

relevance early is what allows students to move toward genuinely accessing their "why" in the course.

BUILD COMPETENCE AND CONFIDENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP

My approach to building undergraduate research assistant (UGRA) competence and confidence in academic and research skills leans on scaffolding responsibility. When first beginning to work with a new UGRA, I introduce structured, well-defined tasks first then expand responsibilities as students demonstrate mastery. This approach is carried out so that each new skill gained by UGRAs are met with a corresponding gain in confidence rather than added pressure. I have trained three UGRAs in the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin in systematic review methodology, starting with the step-by-step application of methodological screening criteria before entrusting them with independent screening decisions. Trained UGRAs have progressed from learning the screening process to how to write scientifically, earning co-authorship on published systematic reviews. I follow the same principle in training UGRAs on recruitment and primary data collection. On a project examining drug overdose preparedness among college students, where I served as co-principal investigator, UGRAs were trained incrementally on participant eligibility verification, informed consent procedures, and survey distribution. This process highlighted development from procedural competence toward the confidence to interact directly with study participants. As UGRAs master one skill, they approach the next with less hesitation and greater initiative.

NURTURE INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY IN SCHOLARSHIP

Although measured structuring of tasks helps to build competence, developing independence requires deliberately loosening that structure as students show readiness. This progression is most evident in my training of research assistants at the University of Texas at Austin in qualitative data analysis among men who have sex with men experiencing significant structural and social vulnerability. After introducing trainees to thematic coding methods and the foundational literature that informed codebook development, I gradually shifted responsibility for interpretive decisions to them as their understanding of the framework deepened. Trainees who demonstrated mastery of the coding framework and qualitative skills were asked to perform second-line coding towards interpreting sensitive, high-stakes narratives about trauma and vulnerability, which is a task that demands considerably more autonomy than first-line coding. What resulted was not just technical competence in coding, but the development of trainees' capacity to make independent interpretive decisions about complex human experiences. This is a skill that transfers directly to self-directed judgment required in independent scholarship or clinical practice. I have found that offering interpretive authority is what distinguishes autonomy-building from skill-building alone. Trainees who are given genuine ownership in their ideas invest with a seriousness that carries into their future professional work.

CONCLUSION

Collectively, the experiences I have cultivated as a trainer in research settings and as a teacher in the classroom reflect my overarching commitment to preparing the next generation of scholars and practitioners to engage meaningfully with complex health and social issues affecting marginalized communities. My approach across these roles is consistently anchored in uncovering and amplifying each student's personal connection to the material, whether in a research or classroom setting. It is my belief that when students access their "why," they are

better equipped not only to succeed academically, but to translate their learning into impactful research and practice that advances health equity for the communities who need it most.