

Teaching Statement

I teach because I believe it is essential to educate students and mold them to be critical thinkers ready to engage with the world around them. It is especially important to give students the information to engage with an increasingly complex world. Drawing from the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, teaching should be a reciprocal process. I empower students to bring their experiences into the classroom and give them the autonomy to not only offer knowledge to their peers, but to educate the professor as well. Learning from students and encouraging them to take their knowledge to empower themselves and others is an important aspect of being a professor and an educator. Making the class as applicable as possible (i.e. utilizing real life examples in classroom discussions) is essential for student's growth and something I take pride in as a professor and educator. If a student is not able to see how the content they are learning can be applied, it is important that the professor recognizes this and works with the student to identify a more appropriate teaching method.

I found through my experience as an educator that the problem posing method is a phenomenal method to utilize to engage students and help them see the importance of what they are learning. The problem posing method, as introduced by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, consists of a model of teaching that emphasizes critical thinking with the intent of promoting liberation. I find it particularly powerful to use historical events in class and have students reflect on how these events impact the society we currently occupy. For example, discussing the implications of the Civil Rights Movement is a historical event students enjoy dissecting and drawing lessons from to use in contemporary advocacy efforts. I also have students reflect on how their identity empowers them in everyday life or may add barriers they have to navigate to reach their goals. In my practice experience I found the more self-aware I was the better clinician I was. I do my best to encourage my students to explore and affirm whom they are during class discussions to reach their full academic and professional potential. I equip students with the tools to begin the process of truly liberating their own minds and becoming critical thinkers. I teach students in my class to utilize a critical lens, which entails always asking, "What is the root of this issue" and viewing a particular issue from multiple perspectives. I also encourage my students to have dialogue with one another and respectfully challenge their peers when they disagree or want their peers to see a particular issue from a different lens. It is important for students to ask themselves and the people around them difficult questions. Students have responded well to the opportunity to view society from a more critical lens.

As an educator, I believe it is important to utilize a variety of learning activities to keep students engaged throughout the semester. Combining lecture-based classes and discussion-based classes is one way I help facilitate learning in the classroom in different ways. I also put students into small groups during class discussions and then have them report to the class. This way students who may not feel comfortable talking in front of the large group will still be able to be heard. Implementing discussion boards and weekly critical reflections is another method I use to engage with my students. I encourage them to not only engage with the material but also with each other while letting them know respectful civil discourse is encouraged and important for their development. I also assign group projects and encourage the students to use each other as resources. While teaching the Organizations and Communities class, I found students were able to identify professional skills they will be able to utilize in their careers as a result of completing the semester long group community project. Working within a team and identifying team members'

leadership abilities, strengths and areas for growth are vital life skills I have my students practice in the classroom.

I aim to create a classroom environment that is inclusive, engaging and thought provoking. I create an inclusive classroom by welcoming students of all identities and ability levels and treating them equitably. I want students to feel as if they are going to be challenged intellectually, but at the same time have the comfort of knowing they do not always have to have a correct answer when they speak. I find students are willing to open up more and challenge themselves once a rapport is established with me, and I strive to build an organic connection with the students from day one. I establish rapport by bringing my humor, love for learning, and personable personality into the classroom. Once rapport is built students are much more open to having difficult conversations and being challenged on sensitive discussions that are needed to build their self-awareness and reach their potential. I also find being flexible with students by offering adaptable office hours, and being available through multiple forms of communication, go a long way. Students who take my class quickly realize although I am there to challenge them and help them learn the course curriculum; I also care about them as human beings and want them to reach their full potential. I have students ask me for recommendation letters and thank me for being an open and committed professor. Providing mentorship is important to me, especially to students who may lack a significant number of role models in their life or who have yet to scratch the surface of their potential.

I strongly believe it is important to provide a variety of different ways to measure student progress in the classroom, which is why I provide a variety of assignments for students to complete. Whether it be reflections, tests, or presentations, assessments are not only important to gauge where the student is in their learning of the course material, but also serve the purpose of seeing where I can fill in gaps. This is meant to give students who may not be strong in one area of measurement, for example students who may suffer from anxiety when taking tests, other avenues to display their knowledge of the material. Helping students merge theoretical concepts and evidence-based practices with culturally relevant examples is an excellent way to keep the class dynamic and relatable.

Overall, I aim to be an educator where students can reflect back and say that I cared about them and I challenged them to be the best version of themselves in the classroom. I pass out an anonymous midterm survey and take the comments seriously. I emphasize aspects of the class students find helpful and make adjustments to the class when feasible. I do my best to express my passion for teaching the course material being presented and show students I take my job of training students to be socially conscious, self-aware and competent social workers very seriously. I view teaching as a privilege to mold minds that have the potential to change the world, a privilege that I do not take lightly.