

## Teaching Philosophy | Chun Liu

Teaching is an art. “Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace”, says the famous Chinese educator and philosopher Confucius. This quote emphasizes the importance of education, which is why I find teaching so exciting and inspiring. I believe education in the social work field specifically embodies that same philosophy. Social work strives to empower vulnerable populations and promote social justice as the foundation of our profession, and teaching plays a very significant role in it.

One unique aspect of my teaching comes from my international background. As a person who attended college in China, and obtained MSW and PhD degrees in the United States, I bring international perspectives to the classes I teach. For example, in my Social Policy class, I include a lecture on international comparisons of social welfare programs and policies in other European and Asian countries. I also share my experience and knowledge in social policy and practice in China with my students. I believe that such lectures are extremely valuable to students because they can have a better understanding of the social welfare system in the United States by comparing it to other countries. It also encourages students to examine social problems in broader sociocultural contexts from multiple angles, which leads to greater opportunities for innovative and critical thinking. I strongly believe these skills are crucial for my students to become social work leaders in promoting the well-being of disadvantaged populations.

It is important for an instructor to create an inclusive learning environment so that everyone can feel safe and supported. For every student, feeling freely engaged in learning is the premise of acquiring new skills. To build an inclusive environment, I use different teaching strategies to make learning accessible to every student, based on their own educational needs. For example, in my BSW Statistics class I use multiple methods to present information such as verbal cues and visual information, because each student has a different learning style. In addition, I use humor in the classroom, which has been shown to have many benefits for students. Engaging students with humor helps create a positive social and emotional learning environment, and increases their interest in learning. Furthermore, I strive to maintain self-awareness about any biases and prejudices I may bring to the classroom. And, I make myself available to my students in many different ways such as office hours, anonymous feedback and surveys, emails, and mid-term evaluations.

Along with creating an inclusive environment, I utilize multiple teaching and instructional strategies to support student learning. First, I create a safe environment, in which students can freely express their opinions in class. I also make sure the classroom has boundaries, that is, everyone has a chance to talk freely and respect for each other is expected. Second, I organize my class with many new Internet and computer technologies to encourage student participation in class. For example, online polls, or live surveys can easily give me a basic idea of the general, real-time, and anonymous opinions of students in the classroom without worrying about violation of confidentiality. All of these innovative approaches help students practice critical thinking and develop problem-solving skills. Third, I incorporate different ways of presenting the class materials, not limited to Canvas or other learning management systems, to best get students organized. For example, I create an online panel for classmates to exchange their ideas or ask students to search for course materials by themselves in order to motivate self-learning.

I also endeavor to motivate my students to learn actively by building an individualized learning process. I encourage students to learn based on their own learning objectives driven by their motivations rather than mine. For example, in my BSW Social Policy course, students are assigned a semester-long policy analysis project, which provides each group with common interests and an opportunity to investigate a social issue. My design of this class emphasizes both problem-solving skills and critical thinking. Most importantly, I want my students to be passionate about what they learn and become confident in leading class discussions. I communicate with students about their career goals and their expectations of the class so that I can tailor my instruction based on the reflections. If some students have their own special interest or learning objectives, I can give them necessary resources in addition to course content. In addition, I adjust the class objectives to reflect the social work discipline, including core concepts of social work competencies, professional standards and code of ethics.

Aligned with my teaching goals and strategies, I develop multiple tools to assess student learning. At the start of the semester, I give students the opportunity to submit feedback and comments anonymously. It offers me an idea of where the students are and what the class dynamics are. Based on the nature of the courses I teach, I incorporate both in-class exercises and tests to assess students' understanding of course concepts. For a research method or statistics course, I use an academic paper or multiple exams to test students' learning. For a practice or clinical course, I incorporate class projects, roleplaying exercises, and a reflection paper to assess it. In addition to those assessment methods, I also use other tools like short quizzes or take-home exercises throughout the semester.

As more and more schools are offering online courses, and enrollments in online programs continue to grow every year, effective online pedagogy has never been so important. In the spring of 2020, during the pandemic, I managed to quickly overcome the transition to online learning and adjust my teaching accordingly in a short time. I gained many valuable experiences from teaching online courses during this transition. I created my online instructional plan, which included a new course structure, learning outcomes, and instruction format. I learned and actively utilized the latest technology tools to support remote work and learned important software platforms such as Zoom and Canvas. One thing I always keep in mind is to create an accessible online course so that no student is left out due to technical difficulties. I made accommodations for students such as offering additional office hours, video recording the class content, and adding captions for media materials. I believe my skills and experiences in teaching online courses are crucial to being a successful professor in the future.

Overall, my teaching style is patient, humorous, and interactive. I wish to provide my students with the knowledge and experiences I have and help them explore their strengths and areas to grow. Teaching is a learning process for both instructors and students. I strive to be a great mentor and role model to my students, who are going to be the future of our profession. Therefore, I am very passionate about the opportunities to support my students' growth. I will continue to work to be the best possible teacher throughout my entire career. Teaching is an art, and I strive to include the foundation of hope, confidence and peace in all of my classes.