Teaching Philosophy: Creating Collaborative Spaces to Learn and Teach

Tomorrow's communicators, scientists, environmental activists and policy leaders need to be equipped with the technical, scientific and theoretical background to address the complex, multiscalar and politicized nature of environmental problems. In the classroom I strive to merge knowledge of theory and systems thinking needed for students to ground their careers and civic life.

Engaging with the World

As an instructor, I seek to create a hands-on learning community in the classroom that facilitates peer-to-peer learning and validates the life experiences students bring to the learning setting. I have taught a wide range of undergraduate and graduate material, including: environmental communication, radio and digital video production, social media and visual communication, within the topical areas of media systems, strategic communication, journalism and communication for the life sciences.

I foster a commitment to helping students engage with the world around them, both locally and beyond our borders. In my time as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and as an early career scholar at DePaul University, outside of formal teaching duties, I have also shared my experiences researching abroad through guest lectures and workshops.

Fostering Hands-on Learning

I believe that learning is a collaborative process of making connections. Student learning happens in a variety of settings on campus—classrooms, labs, through peer mentoring, student organizations—and beyond the academy. To both learn and teach, one has to first listen. Living life is a continual learning process. Learning is about making mistakes, reflecting on them and growing mentally and emotionally as an outcome of these reflections.

I enact my teaching and learning philosophy in the classroom with continual formative assessment of student learning by including a mix of large and small group classroom activities, with an emphasis on open-ended scenario-based exercises designed to stimulate student problem-solving and creativity. I also continually seek to be self-reflective in my teaching and open to changing course and trying new instructional methods if I realize something is not working out as planned.

I design summartive assessment methods with the goal of measuring my students higher-order understanding of key concepts and ability to transfer skills gained to other facets of their lives. This critical reflection in and outside of the classroom makes me a more dynamic instructor who seeks to integrate the unique motivations each set of students brings to our shared learning community. In this way I see teaching as scholarship of active learning and reflection to help realize achieve authentic achievement.

Learning as a Journey

Understanding where my students are in their personal learning journeys is an important guiding

principle at the core of my teaching. As a teacher, I strive to integrate feedback from my students into my instruction. For example, in a critical moment in the classroom, in a radio production course for first-year students, I found that my students on the whole did very poorly on a early-semester assignment asking them to write a one-minute news story. I then asked the class how many of them listen to news radio on a regular basis. Only a handful raised their hands.

I decided to step back and reflect on how I could improve my teaching methods. I needed to recognize that they did not come to the learning environment with prior knowledge that would have enabled them to successfully complete the assignment. We listened to several news stories, using them as a case studies to discuss the elements of journalistic writing for the ear and peer reviewed their stories so they were able to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing. With this feedback in hand, I gave them an opportunity to resubmit their work for a new grade. This helped lower their anxiety about doing poorly in their first semester of college.

In addition, I strive to provide a personal aspect to my interaction with students. For example, when students struggle in my classes or miss significant numbers of class meetings I reach out to them. I found that if I can get students into my office to meet with me one-on-one I can strategize with them how they can complete the course requirements for a passing grade, provide individual attention and academic support, as well as refer them to other campus resources. For example, one undergraduate student I taught last year, wrote me after the end of the term with this to say:

> I wanted to thank you for the kind words you left me with during our last one-on-one a couple of weeks ago. What you said meant a lot to me and has helped me push through the last few weeks as best as I can, and they've given me a lot of hope in terms of the projects and career path that I plan to pursue.

Service Learning for Technological Innovation
In terms of community engagement, for my "Social Media and the News" graduate course at DePaul University, I had students work with four nonprofit publications and social organizations for their final group projects to develop a strategic communications plan: Slow Roll Chicago, *In These Times* magazine, the *Windy City Times* and *The DePaulia*. The students' real world, community service work was well received by the nonprofits we partnered with. For example, the *Windy City Times* editor, Tracy Baim, wrote, "The students provided valuable insight into what we currently do, as well as recommendations for what we can do to improve our web and social media plan."

Reflective Teaching Practice
I am excited about teaching. I believe learning is a life-long holistic process, for myself as well as those I teach. As a early career faculty member, I seek out professional development opportunities to improve my teaching methods.