

## Teaching Philosophy

My pedagogical approach is rooted in the underlying belief that change is possible. As a social worker, I believe fundamentally in the inherent dignity and worth of every person and in his or her ability to learn and grow. My belief in the possibility of change extends naturally to students in the classroom setting, where I strive to facilitate student mastery. Because students learn at different speeds and in different ways, I work with students at an individual level to identify barriers to their learning and develop creative work-arounds for mental blocks. I structure major assignments to be submitted in increments, which allows students to revise and resubmit work that does not yet reflect their full potential. I respond to emails promptly, emphasize my availability for one-on-one meetings, and provide timely, personalized feedback on assignments. I am committed to creating a space in which every student can be successful, yet is accountable to rigorous academic standards worthy of the social work profession.

With nine years of experience in community organizing, program development and evaluation, grant writing, and nonprofit management, my instruction is heavily informed by my practice background. I am able to share with students about my successes and failures in the fields of community work, administration, and policy as a means of helping them concretize theoretical material. In addition, I prepare carefully for each course by reviewing the most current research on class topics. I believe that social work education is a key conduit for the flow of research knowledge into practice. Therefore, I emphasize both evidence-based practice and evidence-based teaching as crucial to responsible social work practice.

While communication of practice knowledge is important, Friere emphasizes that education is a dialogue of shared experiences. In this tradition, learning is a mutual process in which both student and teacher must be actively engaged and open to discovery. Due to the overwhelming literature on the topic, I recognize that lecture alone is insufficient to transmit lasting knowledge or to move students toward higher order thinking skills. I provide a diverse array of learning opportunities in the classroom, including challenging discussion, hands on application, and experiential activities. For instance, when teaching about using data for community decision-making, I lead students through group decision-making processes that I have applied in meetings as a community organizer and then facilitate a debriefing of the conflicts and questions which come up for participants during such a process. This activity gives students tools for working in communities and organizations, and also allows them to experience firsthand the challenges of group-decision making.

UTA is among the most ethnically diverse universities in the nation, and issues related to social justice and diversity are frequently explored in my classroom. Materials such as Peggy McIntosh's *Invisible Knapsack* and reflections on historical traumas like the murder of Emmett Till are used as jumping off points for challenging discussions about the role of race, sex, and ability in modern society. I teach from a perspective of cultural humility over cultural competence, emphasizing that respectful engagement with communities requires the ability to listen more often than the ability to speak.

I use Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide to direct student learning upward from memorization and summarization to synthesis and critical evaluation. This is reflected by my preference for open-ended assessment formats which allow students to apply knowledge and create practical products. Typical assignments in my course require students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills by means of a mock grant proposal, a community mapping project, or a management consulting report. I rarely assign multiple choice exams or quizzes, but often utilize written reflections to demonstrate comprehension of basic knowledge and to encourage engagement with course concepts.

While I carefully select my methods, I recognize that my instruction strategies may not always create the desired impact. I am constantly seeking to improve my effectiveness as an educator through open acceptance of student, peer, and supervisor feedback. I conduct confidential mid-term evaluations, seeking feedback from students about the pace and intensity of the course and the relative value of each teaching method employed. I keep detailed course notes about which activities, assignments, and readings are useful and which need adjustments before the course is administered again in the future.

At the time of my application, I have taught six semesters of graduate and undergraduate courses during my doctoral studies, in traditional, online, and hybrid formats. My teaching in community, administration, and policy courses is informed by my significant post-MSW practice background in community organizing and nonprofit management. At Arizona State University, my experience as a practitioner would be an asset when teaching concentration courses in the Planning, Administration and Community Practice concentration; however, I am also enthusiastic about teaching foundational courses to new social work students, including theory and research methods.

During my time as an instructor at the University of Texas at Arlington, I retained the primary responsibility for course development, using core curriculum requirements and required readings as a guide. I have been pleased to observe a high level of student engagement and success in my courses, and this is reflected by outstanding course reviews in my personally administered mid-course evaluation as well as the school administered final course evaluation. I was honored in 2013-2014 with the Graduate Instructor of the Year Award, given by the UTA School of Social Work to the graduate instructor with the most exemplary course reviews.

I believe that in each student, I encounter an opportunity to impact the lives of many by equipping him or her for skillful, informed service. I consider this opportunity an honor and am passionate about teaching social work students how they can use their unique gifts to inspire change in the world around them. Likewise, I am committed to continual growth and learning of my own that enables me to become a better social work practitioner, researcher, and educator. The greatest compliment that I receive from my students is that, following our course, they feel equipped with new and powerful ways to make a lasting impact in the community.