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Teaching Statement

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My teaching approaches have developed over the course of the five years as a Graduate Teaching Associate in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University as well as in my current position as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Kutztown University. During this time I have worked, taught, and learned within a relatively close-knit community of engaged colleagues. I have taught introductory courses with class-sizes averaging around thirty-five students as well as upper-division undergraduate seminars with as few as six students, including ASU's senior capstone course. Whereas many faculty members at Arizona State University routinely taught lecture courses of 100 or more students, I had the privilege to teach discussion and writing-intensive courses that emphasize application and critical thinking. I have also served as a Seminar Assistant and guest facilitator at the graduate level, worked as a Teaching Assistant in large lecture courses of up to 400 students, and taught in ASU's online program, which provided me with an understanding of the opportunities and challenges encountered in online courses and skills for developing successful platforms for web-based learning and fostering immediacy in mediated contexts. Working at Kutztown University for the past year has further contributed to my growth as a teacher as I navigate the landscape of a smaller institution serving many first generation students.

My own background as a “non-traditional” student prepares me well for working with a diverse student population and for making connections between course material and students’ lives. Having re-entered my formal schooling after working for several years as an independent singer-songwriter with activist commitments, my pedagogy is richly influenced by the desire to connect theorizing with experience. My engagements “on the ground” with community members committed to social justice in its many forms further inform my commitments as a teacher-scholar as I seek to build bridges between academic scholarship and the larger publics and communities in which we participate.

In the classroom, I strive to illustrate theory and practice as reciprocal processes. Three practical goals assist me in this regard: making course content relevant to students, underscoring the centrality of rhetoric and communication for our lives, and fostering a passion for social responsibility and justice. Each goal has a corresponding outcome of fostering engagement and skill building, developing critical thinking skills, and contributing to personal and community growth. Through a variety of teaching and assessment methods, I seek to make course materials relevant to students with a variety of experiences, backgrounds, and learning styles. For example, in my Gender and Communication and Intercultural Communication courses, traditional means of assessment are supplemented with a creative nonfiction essay assignment. In this essay, students link their identity formation to larger structures through the use of vivid narrative writing. This gives students a chance to understand the course material through the lens of their own lives, while also

“Roberta really was able to get the most out of the students through a variety of learning principles. She is a wonderful teacher.”

recognizing and building skills often overlooked by standardized assessment practices. In the Survey of Communication Theory course I recently taught at Kutztown University, a similar assignment takes the form of an application log in which students write about their own life experiences through the lens of different communication theories. Throughout the semester students commented that the connection of the theories to their everyday lives was very useful for helping them to understand the course material. Another successful strategy has been the popular culture assignment that I incorporate into many of my courses including Rhetorical Theory and Approaches, in which students lead their classmates in discussion on a media artifact of their choosing. Students often reference this assignment in course evaluations, reporting that they enjoyed the opportunity to instruct and learn from their peers. Lively classroom discussions encourage the examination of topics from multiple viewpoints, honoring difference and disagreement and enabling students to find their own entrances into course materials while also considering perspectives they may have overlooked. Through such practices, I endeavor to build an inclusive and dynamic classroom environment where students can examine the complexity of communication in its many facets. By critically examining their own experiences in relation to course materials and applying their learning in ways well-suited to their individual academic and career goals, students leave my classes with complex understandings of rhetoric, cultural, and communicative practices, improved writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills, and concrete methods for applying their skills to understand and shape the world around them.

As a feminist teacher-scholar with specializations in rhetoric, critical-cultural studies, transnational/postcolonial feminisms, and public memory, my courses further offer students critical methods for observing and understanding communicative processes, public engagement, and citizenship as inflected by symbolic and material entanglements of nation, race, gender, and sexuality, along with other cultural and political economic forces. Providing students with skills and analytical capacities for recognizing overlapping systems of privilege and inequality not only prepares them for their future careers or postgraduate training, it also helps them to become responsible and ethical leaders and citizens in today's global landscape. By creating spaces for students to engage the complexities of difference and inequality as they are shaped by, and reflected in, communication practices, I also encourage students to take active classroom roles and to share their learning with one another as they explore new ideas and discover new ways of seeing. My success in this regard is evidenced in my teaching evaluations, which consistently include comments that my courses connected communication theory to students' everyday lives, challenged their existing perspectives in productive ways, and offered them new ways of understanding the world around them.

"I felt as if I learned things that I never would have learned unless I took this course which was useful because everything related to the real world. It helped me look at things from a different perspective."

When I have the opportunity to teach a course several times, I reflect on previous teaching evaluations in order to improve my teaching effectiveness and the class structure. As a faculty member, I look forward to the opportunity to continue to make an impact in the lives of students and to further develop as a teacher and scholar while serving my department, university, discipline, and community.