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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Each time I teach a course, my younger self sits in the room.

When I began my undergraduate degree in English, I quickly realized that there was more to reading than appreciating a good story. In class, my professors and peers discussed literature with a level of depth, attention, and awareness that I did not have. I came to my Intro to Literature feeling confident that I knew what Frost's poems were about. I left class flabbergasted by the concept of phonetic intensives. Over time, I began to make these connections for myself. At the end of the course, my professor shook my hand and said he'd never read a better explication of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In that moment, everything opened up—the entire world had authors and audiences, was full of texts, and I had developed the tools to read and understand it.

Today, as I prepare my courses, I remember how lost I initially felt in a maze of double meanings, and how rewarding it was to finally navigate them. My goal is to teach my students, both in introductory composition classes, and in advanced literature courses, to read and write beyond the words. A sophisticated reader/writer is aware of various audiences and of rhetorical skills to reach those audiences. My students learn about interrelated nature of concepts like audience, purpose, sound, and structure in writing; and I help them see the connections between reading, writing, and their daily lives.

I begin my course-planning by looking for a variety of course materials: old and new, long and short, written and audio-visual, from scholarly and pop-cultural backgrounds. For instance, in my Freshman Composition course, I place selections from Annie Dillard, Kurt Vonnegut, and Mark Doty alongside webcomics, *This I Believe* essays, and magazine advertisements. I expose my students to authors, genres, and works they might not have encountered before. At the end of the course, I give the students a chance to respond to the texts, telling me which ones they connected to the most and why.

I try to incorporate this same variety into my lectures, making connections between high literature and familiar pop-culture artifacts. To bring these connections home, I often supplement my lectures with images, short videos, and visual presentations like Prezi or Powerpoint. My lectures explore patterns in the readings to use as lenses to show the students how seemingly disparate works relate to each other. For example, in my British Literature course, I explain some features of Restoration comedy by comparing it to today's sitcoms, pointing out the stock characters, the multiple intersecting plotlines, and the emphasis on romance and sex. All of these things combine to make the learning environment comfortable, interesting, and stimulating.

In addition, I design my classes to accommodate several learning styles. While the classtime itself is usually taken up with lectures, presentation, and discussion, the students also utilize small-group or pair discussion, which allows the students who fear speaking in a large group space to articulate their thoughts. In all my classes, I incorporate subjective in-class writing or short online discussion board responses. These offer me a chance to ask questions, to suggest lines of inquiry, and

to engage the student's writing in a less formal way. I also offer students a chance to experience the learning that goes hand-in-hand with teaching. In my Shakespeare course, students were given an option to either present on a researched topic, such as Humoral Theory, or to act out two different versions of a scene from the weekly reading. Initially, the students were apprehensive about performing for their classmates, but these scene presentations, and the discussion that followed, soon became the highlight of the week.

My favorite course assignments work both as a learning opportunity and as a chance to test students' knowledge. As such, I employ a mixture of objective and subjective assessment. I believe that for grading to be fair, there must be a measure of standardization. In my freshman composition course, I employ portfolio grading, documenting my personalized writing instruction over the semester but only applying the grade to the final draft. This way, the student leaves with a tangible record of her performance and growth, as well as my notes from various drafts and conferences. In literature courses, I write exams that mix matching, short answer, and short essay prompts. However, I have seen students come alive when asked to create something meaningful and personal in response to their learning, such as the student who wrote an alternate final scene for *The Winter's Tale* in which most of the principal characters reject Leontes. In his process memo, the student cited examples from the play and other Shakespearean works to back up his theory that Leontes was a poor ruler, father, and husband, and did not deserve his family. I also design projects which have a practical outcome for the students. For instance, in my History of Text Technologies class, I encouraged the students, many of whom were Editing and Writing Majors, to create a final project using the web. My hope was that they would develop important skills and create something that they will be proud to include in portfolios of their work as they enter the job market.

My students, however, are not the only ones making connections and applying new information. When I'm teaching, I am learning at the same time because the classroom environment is always forcing me to adapt. I feel excited and in control even as I improvise. When students come to me and discuss the portrayal of female characters in the recent *Avengers* film, I see them learning to employ their knowledge of these concepts in their responses to not only literature but also every sort of text that they come across. My hope is that that they can actively use their knowledge as they craft their own texts and ultimately experience the kind of pride I felt when I finally received an A on my paper about the Eliot poem.