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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

In an era where many social and political issues are rooted in a lack of understanding and empathy, I believe that the purpose of higher education is to equip students with the habits of mind to empathize with a diverse group of peers and to work together toward the greater good. This belief is the foundation upon which I build my teaching philosophy. In my day-to-day life as an instructor, I strive to create a space where all students can develop rich relationships with one another and can deepen their own understanding of course content through hands-on, applied learning experiences—and thus become more empathetic human beings who are equipped to enter our global society and work toward a better future for all.

To achieve this goal, I first create a welcoming community within my classroom. At the start of each semester, I dedicate a significant portion of class time to building a strong classroom community through icebreakers and discussion. After the formation of this community, I then create a dialogue-centered space in which my students can continue to get to know one another and to co-construct knowledge in a team setting by including at least one group activity per class. These activities range in subject and intensity but are always united by the same core principles, in that they require students to master, not memorize, content and to engage respectfully with one another's perspectives. Through extensive peer review and feedback periods around midterms, I also teach my students to see their peers as collaborators and resources on which they can rely. Only when my students learn to trust in and take one another's advice to heart can they truly be equipped to become engaged, problem-solving global citizens. I end each course by drawing on this sense of community and challenging my students to take what they have learned and apply it in ways that address a larger social issue of their choosing. I take a relational-centered approach in every course I teach because I believe that students can only learn once they feel comfortable within the learning environment and with one another—and, once they begin to see their instructor and peers as valuable resources, can achieve the true aim of higher education.

My teaching evaluations show this philosophy to be extremely effective in my classroom. My students have noted that requiring them to regularly work together "made everyone feel welcome in the class" and helped to "foster a community among people who are adjusting to college life," creating an environment that they love to return to every class period. My connections between course content and their everyday lives kept the class "fun and relatable to [their] age group and interests" and encouraged them to "think about things [they had] never thought about before." Above all, my students have noted that my class has better equipped them to go out and change the world and has "compelled [them] to become better writers and public speakers."

To have a tangible, sustained impact on the lives of students, I believe that higher education should be founded upon relationships—those between students and instructors, as well as those between students and their peers. It is my hope that these relationships will help students become more empathetic human beings who are equipped to enter a global society and work toward a better future for all. Education, in its purest form, should aim to foster a sense of empathy and understanding between diverse groups so that all may work together toward the betterment of our society—and that is what I aim to achieve in my classroom.