Teaching Philosophy

Learning is more than the ability to recite facts and figures. Learning is acquiring then using the context of our lives to understand those facts and figures. When we do this, we open the door to understanding data in the context of the world, the very nature of "fact making" itself. This ability to contextualize information, borne of equal parts observation and understanding, develops the critical thinking skills that encourage life-long connection, discovery and assessment. Within any ethnic, social or contemporary study (which includes disciplines as specific as Native American Studies), critical thinking is vital. Within such scholarly pursuit we concern ourselves with the past and contemporary lives and living, of a group of people. Here, "Skill" includes the knowledge and conceptual understanding of history, but "Mastery" is something else. "Mastery" happens within a stable state of flux, understanding or shifting perspective as needed, sometimes while also applying stable concepts strategically as the discipline's subject grows/shifts/adjusts/becomes. In such a world as this, it can be easy to get lost in the historical data and miss the point entirely.

Values, Beliefs, and Aspirations

I hope to support and guide college and graduate level students towards mastery through transcultural, transformative, self-directed and experiential learning steeped in anti-oppressive assessment and critical reflection with an ultimate goal of teaching social justice. A transdisciplinary approach, providing ample opportunity to work with the tools of multiple disciplines across multiple educational landscapes to explore historical, literal and figurative silences is key to American Indian Studies. Undoubtedly, in encouraging mastery, I will need to apply several theories of learning—blending the most appropriate elements of each as needed.

I aspire to a classroom experience where both teacher(s) and students are safe, engaged/interested, interactive, supportive/supported and open to new ways of knowledge and ways of knowing. In this atmosphere, all beings present are coaches, experts (of something), entertainers and co-catalysts of thought/belief changing ideas. I believe this happens most frequently when the focus is on the students' needs, skills and experiences, with the teacher and other attendant staff supporting the student's engagement with the learning process and content.

Ideal Student Outcomes

All students bring unique perspectives and particular skill sets to the classroom environment. In addition to increased knowledge in the course topic area and enhanced skill using the tools of the discipline, an "ideal student" would leave a series of my "ideal classroom experiences" having enhanced or increased their knowledge, understanding and skills in the following areas.

- Presentation/Public Speaking
- Creative Expression/Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking/Analysis
- Openness to Other Perspectives
- Enhanced Conflict Resolution

- The Framework of Oppression
- Intellectual Initiative
- Advanced Research Skills
- Self-Esteem/Self Knowledge
- Politics of Power & Sense of Self Power

Teaching Methods Generally Employed

- Presentations (group & individual)
- Written Reflections (w/ & without class)
- Creative Reflections (using music, poetry…)
- Discussion (large and small group)
- Research Opportunities

- Group Simulations
- Guest Lecture/Film Experiences
- Interactive Lecture
- Simulation Exercises and Activities
- Case Studies, as appropriate

Teacher as Mentor

Ideally, the educational experience provides students with the opportunity to experience receiving and giving good mentorship. I expect to model appropriate mentor behavior within the space of access & boundaries, assistance (giving answers) & coaching (encouraging others to find their own answers), challenge & support, dedication to work & self-care. An observer might see me advising and mentoring students during regular office hours and by appointment, with basic agreed upon guidelines. They would see specific meeting goals that include room for the unexpected question or concern. They might hear me ask the advisee how they experience the situation or question at hand or share my perspective and ask the advisee why that might be different/the same. In general, I would expect that an observer might see a full and regular discussion (as much as possible) between me and a student (or students) that I mentor.

The Classroom

The values and beliefs detailed above are realized in a classroom that has highly interactive and personalized activities, a variety of approaches to knowledge sharing, an open definition of "expert," clearly explained and easily accessible classroom expectations as well as group developed "atmosphere setting" ground rules. There are regular opportunities to develop community cohesion through group work with student input and well established expectations. There are also regular opportunities for students to work independently to establish and develop individual perspective on the topic.

I will assess student understanding through regular and quick understanding/misconception checks as well as the content of their written and oral presentations and discussion. Some assignments/activities will be graded while others will remain a means of assessment only. As needed, some (a few) tests might be incorporated. I prefer a point or percentage scale grading system but understand that a curve may be required by the administration under which I work. I am open to either method as long as I can structure a fair rubric that is simultaneously inclusive of differing learning styles.

Continued Professional Growth

I expect that other professional activities (continued classes, research, conferences and outside presentations) will support my continued personal growth and exposure to alternative teaching ideas/strategies. My personal teaching ideas have changed as I have moved through the educational system, worked as a teacher and observed other teachers engaged on their own teaching path. I've become more insistent on interactive, personalized and creative expression activities within the learning environments where I provide input. Student evaluations serve as an opportunity to clarify where improvements have worked as well as how to achieve better results. Ideally student evaluations are happening throughout the course. While I do believe that one can measure the effectiveness of one's teaching in the moment in the room, student evaluations, enrollment and comments from other observers can provide helpful clues as well. I also expect to solicit evaluations from experts outside the classroom (teaching evaluators) on a regular basis.