

TEACHING STATEMENT

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In an inclusive classroom, in which the commitment to creating a democratic space is shared between student and instructor, learning is approached and remembered differently. Creating such a space begins by ensuring that students and instructors understand their role as both learners *and* contributors. My classroom physically reflects this dynamic: students always sit in a formation where they can see each other, and the displacement of bodies, including my own, is incorporated into everyday activities. As learners, we are humbled to open our ideas to other perspectives, and as contributors, we recognize our responsibility in creating productive conversations and meaningful content. Laying down this framework also reconstructs the hierarchies of a typical classroom, because contributions from all members – from outside knowledge of a subject to in-class reactions – decentralizes who provides knowledge and where that knowledge comes from.

Actively placing myself in a position to learn continuously prompts me to reflect so that I can match my students' ambitions. In the different institutions I have taught at, these ambitions can manifest in the quality of work or even in the willingness to make daily two-hour commutes to the university. They nevertheless have inspired me to take risks, including experimentation with diverse material. In my first-year writing seminar for example, we read Jacques Derrida's essay on "Différance" whose challenging language gave students a new lens to look at communication. Many ended up writing on Derrida in their unit essay, especially in conjunction with the unconventional poem *Zong!* by M. NoubéSe Philip. On another level, this conscious positioning sets the example of our shared investment in a cohesive class, regardless of age, background or experience. Being a first generation student of color, my first instinct is to understand where each student comes from. It is a gesture at making the classroom a safe, but also productive space. More specifically, identifying myself as a language learner and normalizing corrections early in my French classes has played a significant role in urging students to take a chance with new vocabulary and expressions.

Beyond the measures of oral class participation, inclusivity is the recognition of different skill sets and backgrounds. I am flexible in what "participation in the classroom" means, understanding that ideas can take time to formulate and are not always easily expressed aloud. In my Advanced French course, I ask students to post responses to readings the night before on our course site, so that in class they can read each other's reflections and state their positions in relation to one another's. My courses also generally include both creative and critical thinking assignments, with journal entries such as "Speak in the voice of another," or multimedia curations on the recurring class themes. For example, my writing seminar used the online platform Padlet.com to organize mini exhibits based on diasporic returns. Students are able to use these lower-stake assignments to brainstorm and practice creating content for their graded essays, as well as demonstrate their growth in reflection.

In many ways then, a successful class session to me is a micro example of the semester-long learning objectives. My lesson plans build on material students have already been exposed to, such as a previous lesson, and push students to move not only toward open conversation but also discussion leadership. In an intermediate French course for example, on a unit on "La société" based off textbook *Sur Le Vif*, groups of three students work together to develop discussion questions around a contemporary social issue given (racism, unemployment, immigration, etc.). I then invite a group to begin with a question, and remind them that if a question relates to another topic, they could intervene and change topics. In this class, my students asked questions that not only applied relevant vocabulary and question syntax, but also incorporated reflection on the status of immigration in the United States or racism in institutions. For the remainder of that class, the students led the classroom discussion without my intervention. Scaffolding discussions in this way is appropriate for this level of French and also demonstrates my role in facilitating that democratic atmosphere for learning.

Beyond classroom walls, my commitment to student well-being and success has translated to encouraging them in their interests, such as attending their performances and art exhibits, as well as writing letters to support their academic endeavors. I met with many in Paris when I knew we overlapped abroad, and have held weekly French conversation hour with students even after their finished language requirements. While it is true I remained a resource for their advancement of the language, the possibility of extending our learning outside of the formal classroom context is a reflection of the democratic environment – of simultaneous learners and contributors – that was cultivated within the classroom.