Shannon McGovern

Teaching Philosophy

Early on in my career as a human resources representative for a non-profit therapeutic community, I had several opportunities to teach. I taught technical skills, like how to use various software, how to prepare for interviews, and how to use social media for networking purposes. I taught skills that were mostly route memorization leaving almost no room for discussion. I liked teaching. I enjoyed how excited our clients felt when they accomplished a skill for the first time. What I did not realize at the time was how different it would be to teach in an academic setting. I did not know much I would enjoy teaching topics that encourage discussion and critical thinking. How energized I would feel hearing students use their life experiences to understand concepts and apply the materials. I did not realize how many times I would leave the classroom feeling hopeful for the future of this next generation and excited by the possibilities.

In my view, learning is a lifelong journey. As long as there is a desire to be a creative, critical thinker, then the journey continues. My classroom will demonstrate that the way forward on this journey is through exploration and curiosity. I work hard to create a welcoming, student-centered learning environment. On the first day of any semester, I work with each class to set expectations of the students, the environment we will create together, and their expectations of me. I ask for student input on how our class should function with the understanding that the expectations set on that first day will be agreed upon by everyone in the classroom and then upheld throughout the semester. One of the key expectations in my classroom is to be respectful of diverse ideas and opinions. Students know that I have high standards. Therefore, I provide students with all of the tools and support necessary to achieve those standards. It is ultimately the student's decision to invest the time and energy into their education. As an undergraduate student, my favorite course was a difficult concept that challenged my way of thinking and encouraged me to collaborate with my peers. I know that collaboration among peers can improve interpersonal skills and teach students how to handle conflict in a relatively low stakes environment. It is important to me that students understand that "failure" is part of the learning process, and how we handle those failures defines our character.

As an instructor, I always strive to be approachable. I solicit mid-semester, anonymous feedback from students on how the course is flowing, what activities help them learn the

materials, and ways they feel the course can be improved. To demonstrate that I genuinely appreciate student feedback, I show them the results of the survey and use it to guide future lessons and applications of the materials. I am always organized, yet I make sure to allow for creative flexibility in the classroom. I encourage student to challenge their current way of thinking and allow new ideas to mold their future thinking. In my view, the goal of teaching is to facilitate learning, and learning occurs through asking questions. I believe that most questions require an interdisciplinary lens to understand the nature of the problem and potential solutions. This interdisciplinary nature requires a strong foundation in theories and concepts that explain the driving factors. I design course materials to build this strong foundation while also encouraging students to expand their thinking beyond the classroom. Once students have built this foundation, course materials are used to apply their knowledge to relevant real-world topics that require them to think critically about a problem.

Feedback is an important part of the learning process. Feedback occurs in my classroom from peers, practitioners, and me. I provide guidance and feedback in the form of class discussions, testing concepts, and written assignments. Practitioners will be invited to the classroom to openly engage in dialogue with students on various topics, highlighting potential career or networking opportunities, while also allowing students to gain a more realistic understanding of what the job market is like after graduation. Peer feedback is an important part of the learning process. It is facilitated through small group discussions, group projects, discussion boards, and written evaluations of final presentations. I know that developing communication skills is an important part of any learning process, regardless of the focal topic. I have designed several opportunities for students to practice this feedback to get used to giving and receiving critiques in an effort to normalize this process. Feedback should be constructive, respectful, and ultimately an effort to make us better as a group.

I recognize the importance of integrating traditional approaches to learning, as well as unique course designs and technology that enable students to meet higher-level learning objectives. I know further experience as a teacher at the university level will evolve my methods and expectations. With this experience and practice, I welcome personal and professional growth, but also believe that my core beliefs will remain stable. I believe learning is a lifelong process. I believe my role in that process is to provide the tools and resources to allow students

to feel safe in expressing ideas, pushing boundaries, and knowing that failure is not the end of their journey. I believe interpersonal communication is a key skill in life and strive to build an environment where students feel safe practicing these skills. Learning is a personal passion of mine. I want students to know that I want to engage in meaningful discussions with them where we explore new perspectives, approaches, and ideas together.