

University of Washington School of Social Work

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Education, for me, has always been a personal pursuit of critical, world-changing moments of insight. These brief flashes, where effort and ingenuity come together, have provided me with a constant enthusiasm for learning. In my years as a student, I have been fortunate to have had many instructors, in both formal and personal settings, who have promoted and shaped this enthusiasm, provided opportunities for critical examination of social issues, and nurtured moments of insight for me as their student. I adopted this passion from my teachers and applied it to my work as a counselor in a juvenile detention center, where I challenged myself and the young people I served to think about their situations and their surroundings within the larger sociopolitical contexts in which we resided and worked. In these institutions, I witnessed the transformative power of education and reflexive thinking and became motivated to further pursue my role as a teacher and a guide.

As an instructor in the university setting, I promote critical evaluation through active engagement with the course content, shepherd students' informed social justice perspectives, and help build the skills necessary for them to become effective workers for their communities. These skills, I believe, operate best in the field when individuals have developed confidence in not only the material they learn in the classroom, but in their abilities to find and incorporate new knowledge. For example, as a research methods instructor, I sought to guide students in the development of the skills necessary to not only understand research, but to critically evaluate and apply it to their own work. I am eager to continue teaching research methods and other foundational courses, as I see these as the best opportunities to share my enthusiasm for critical thought and to foster students' motivation toward lifelong learning.

As students approach learning with different abilities and strengths, I strive to provide a safe, dynamic forum for students to be able to incorporate material in ways that are most beneficial for their engagement. My classes utilize multiple methods of instruction and encourage students to relate classroom work to their current practice and future aspirations with their populations and communities of interest. For example, my assignments provide students with the flexibility to select and critique articles relative to their own specific interests and to design evaluations that will be directly applicable in their work. I teach classes in support of these student-selected examples to promote self-directed learning and to motivate students to ask questions.

I see my classroom as a space for students to be guided in their own creative and critical thought through opportunities for reflexive critique and supportive assessment.. My approach to assessment is based on the student's ability to integrate course material

within a practical context. Although I see education as a constant work-in-progress, I acknowledge that students arrive in my classes with a great deal of knowledge and experience, so I provide ample opportunities for students to evaluate one another's work and to seek feedback from their peers. I believe that the classroom serves as an opportunity to foster collaborative skills and professional associations that will strengthen students' identification with the field of social work and of themselves as social workers. As an instructor, I hold myself to the same high standards I set for my students. Being an instructor provides me with the opportunity to serve as not only an educator, but as a model of someone who is motivated toward professional and personal improvement. I believe that teaching is a reflexive and constantly emerging practice that is supported by a collegial atmosphere and multiple modes of feedback for the instructor.

It is my goal not only to provide a solid foundation of information and effective learning, but to also inspire enthusiasm within my students by challenging them to think both critically *and* pragmatically as they train for professional social work practice. I believe my role as an instructor is to help students to build on their strengths and to provide guided and unifying support in conjunction with our discipline's best practices and current evidence-based research. With this multi-faceted approach, I seek to provide my students with a thoughtful, yet expansive approach toward learning.

Selected Comments from Teaching Evaluations

"His enthusiasm for the subject matter was contagious and he made research feel extremely accessible."

- MSW Student from SOCW506: Social Welfare Research and Evaluation

"The instructor's passion was visible throughout the course which I enjoy because seeing someone do what they love rubs off and can make others enjoy it, too."

- MSW Student from SOCW506: Social Welfare Research and Evaluation

"Mr. Fleming is the right balance of being tough (so I actually put in effort to learn and do well) and yet relaxed (so the class environment is conducive to learning and I am not unnecessarily tense)."

- MSW Student from SOCW506: Social Welfare Research and Evaluation

"I really appreciated how Chris gave us a chance to complete a mid quarter evaluation on the class and his teaching. He also used the mid quarter survey as a tool to teach us about research methods and shared the results with the class. I thought this was really brave. He openly discussed our critical feedback and how he would change things and he did!"

- MSW Student from SOCW505: Foundations of Social Welfare Research