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Teaching Philosophy

I believe social work education strives to enable future social workers to perceive social, political, and economic inequalities, and to take action for achieving social justice. Educating students in research and evidence-based practice is critical to providing tools for students to examine social work practices with a scientific lens. Through creative and interactive activities in and outside of my classroom, students learned the skills that are necessary to employ epistemological perspectives to design research and apply research findings to their works. Teaching both MSW and BASW foundation courses, my teaching goals have been helping students to be; informed consumers of scientific evidence; capable of discerning the best evidence for planning interventions; and able to rigorously evaluate policy and practice. To achieve such goals, I have set three pedagogical foci: 1) high, yet realistic, research standards, 2) an individualized learning process; and 3) respect for diverse world views.

Keeping Standards High but also Flexible

For every course I taught, I set challenging goals for both students and myself. At the same time, I allow myself to be flexible in terms of how I achieve such high expectations. Social work students, particularly MSW level, come from diverse educational backgrounds and have uniquely different attitudes toward curriculum. For research courses as an example, students' knowledge and experiences often vary. Furthermore, many students often did not understand the reason why they had to learn them. Hence, at the beginning of each course, I thoroughly assess where my students are at and modify course structures and details, yet still pursuing the original course goals and objectives. This process enables me to create practical ways to motivate their academic interests through customized learning tools, projects, group discussions, and individual meetings. For students, it helped them to understand the purpose of the course thoroughly and eventually motivate them to learn and participate. Following are comments from former students who took my research and evaluation class.

“Youngjun did a great job of applying what we were learning. Many of us are not quantitative/research-focused and he made it seem useful/worthwhile. It stretched my thinking around how we know what we know and how much social workers rely on informal information gathering to verify our concept of the world/make decisions.”

“He completely revamped his syllabus based on where we all were in our learning prior to arriving in his course. He set high standards, but helped us every step of the way.”

“This was way out of my field and areas of expertise. I developed my abilities in surprising ways; I found value in topics and subjects I had previously eschewed. If this [is] was important, then I will assert myself. I'm just glad Youngjun was there to help me on my way.”

Individualizing the Learning Process

Providing individualized service is a core of social work practice. Thus, I believe social work education should also strive to promote individual development within an iterative mentoring process. To accomplish this goal, at the beginning of my classes, I try to learn about students' field practicum, career goals. Also, I ask them what they particularly would like to learn in the course so that I can tailor my instruction and evaluative feedback to their interests. Based on this information, I provide extensive feedback on assignments and tutoring sessions to develop a more individualized process of skill development and content application.

Additionally, I encourage students to reach out to me outside of class or even assigned official hours, to discuss my feedback and revise assignments. Those efforts strive to provide a very supportive educational environment. Following are student comments on their experiences in my classes:

“He gave very thorough individualized feedback and was constantly re-evaluating what to spend time on depending on what students were struggling with. He was always willing to meet outside of class or look at a draft. My research paper is far better than I thought I was capable of producing.”

“Youngjun made sure to check in on each student multiple times throughout the quarter to elaborate on his Canvas comments and open up the offer for more detailed explanations than he could give during the class period. He was always remarkably open to anyone that needed to reach out.”

Respecting Diverse Worldviews

Last, yet importantly, I strive to make my class open and culturally competent. Being an international student, I have dreamed of a classroom that everyone respects each other and learns how to value diversity. As a facilitator in class, I tried to assure everyone has an equal voice, particularly students of color or from outside of the US. I found that research courses could be an excellent place to develop students' competence in different aspects. At the beginning of every class I have taught, I asked students to embrace different research questions and epistemologies. To achieve this goal, I allowed many discussions either in a whole or small groups to understand how people could view social and research problems with different perspectives. Such in-depth conversations helped students examining research methods with diverse cultural aspects and epistemological perspectives. In such activities, students and I could expand our views through listening to different opinions and respectfully asking questions. I also believe that such activities provided my students with opportunities to work harmoniously in professional work settings that often consist of diverse professions and cultural backgrounds.