Teaching Statement

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Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy involves using an active learning style that promotes critical thinking through reading, self-reflection and group discussion with the primary aim of creating a significant learning experience. L. Dee Fink (2010) posits that a significant learning experience is one in which the student is changed by the course and through which the effects from this change are long-lasting and hold high value to both to the individual and to the individual’s future work endeavors.

As a first-generation college student who never expected to become an academic professional, significant learning experiences were those that dramatically changed my life course. These learning experiences typically consisted of active learning and critical inquiry of material, both of which created a more engaging (and ultimately, more motivating) classroom experience. I continue to draw on these personal positive experiences in the classroom as a teacher, both through promoting an active learning environment and through 1:1 meetings with students. In particular, I attempt to engage with those students who may be from non-traditional or disadvantaged backgrounds as I believe that it is of the utmost importance to their learning in the classroom environment and is representative of an active pedagogical social justice stance.

Prior to beginning doctoral studies at the school of social work, I provided over 20 trainings to continuing professional social workers and counselors on evidence-based practice in community mental health settings. I have parlayed this classroom experience into teaching Evidence-Based Practice for Social Work at the undergraduate level and Advanced Social Work Research Methods at the MSW level. My philosophy behind these courses is to have students actively evaluate the importance of evidence in social work practice with vulnerable populations. I utilize principles of active learning by requiring reading which has real-world applications and asking the students to discuss these readings during class time. Students then complete scaffolded writing assignments which work up to a final research project. I challenge students to create their own views by engaging with what has been written and encourage them to move classroom knowledge to the applied practice settings and oppressed populations with whom they will work. My ultimate goal in teaching research-oriented classes to social work students is to inspire them to move forward in their career asking the critical questions about whether we are truly meeting their clients’ needs.

In addition to teaching research courses, my undergraduate training in psychology, MSW practice experience, and substantive focus on the importance of the social environment provides a foundation of knowledge to teach Human Behavior in the Social Environment. Furthermore, I completed a teaching practicum with Dr. Susan Kemp for the course Historical and Intellectual Foundations of Social Work for MSW students. This course combines my love of the history of social work with wonderful active learning opportunities regarding the formation of the social work profession and its influence on students’ foci of interest. I look forward to contributing to a socially just classroom of active learning and critical inquiry in my future scholarly work as a faculty member.