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Teaching Philosophy

My primary goal as an instructor is to encourage students to develop increased awareness of their values, interests and strengths, so that they will be prepared to confidently represent their expertise in interprofessional work settings and to engage with complex social problems. I believe it is essential for practitioners in training to learn to assess the ways in which historical and political contexts influence their areas of interest and practice settings, regardless of whether they plan for a career in direct or macro practice. My teaching philosophy is manifested through three pedagogical foci: 1) individualizing the learning process; 2) creating an active and inclusive learning environment; and 3) integrating ethical and social justice theory, as well as tools for ethical reasoning into social work courses.

Individualized Learning

I view teaching as an opportunity to mentor students through an iterative process of individual development. I believe that making classes applicable to students' learning goals and professional development are essential elements of creating an engaged classroom. Toward that end, I ask students at the beginning of my classes about their career goals and what they would like to learn in the class, so that I can tailor my instruction and evaluative feedback to their interests. When possible, I forward resources outside the course content to individual students based on their particular learning priorities. I also provide extensive feedback on written assignments to demonstrate to students my investment in their learning, and to develop a more individualized process of skill development and content application. Additionally, I offer students an open invitation to discuss my evaluative feedback and revise assignments. This approach provides them an opportunity for development within a supportive structure that also mirrors supervision and collaboration in professional settings. On the last day of my classes, I encourage students to reflect on their learning processes and to consider how the course content will inform their future practice.

Active and Inclusive Learning

Using active learning strategies to create a lively and supportive classroom environment is another important characteristic of my teaching. Active learning strategies allow me to provide a variety of opportunities for students to participate in

classroom activities, which are responsive to a range of learning and communication styles. To support students who are less comfortable speaking in large group discussions, I plan activities such as low stakes writing, think-pair-share and small group exercises. I also tailor activities to course content and the level of learners. One strategy I have used is a gallery walk, which involves posting several questions around the room. Students collaborate in small groups to develop responses to the questions and practice presenting their ideas. Using this strategy, I am able to adjust the complexity of questions I pose based on the level of learners. For example, in undergraduate classes I use more fundamental questions about the course readings. In graduate courses I use questions that require more in-depth assessment and application of course content.

Ethics and Social Justice

My transdisciplinary training and research experience have prepared me to deeply integrate teaching ethics and critical thinking skills when preparing social work learners for the next steps in their professional lives. Teaching on social justice and ethics are integral aspects of my teaching, regardless of whether I am in a classroom setting or training experienced practitioners. I draw from my training in bioethics to provide students with theory, research and applied tools from other fields that are relevant to social work. For example, in an undergraduate social welfare policy course, I offered foundational content on theoretical perspectives on social justice. We then discussed examples of how differing views of social justice are reflected in political positions on social welfare policy. I also introduced students to discourse analysis, and discussed how discourse represents implicit and explicit social values. I then showed a video of a political speech and asked students to work in small groups to identify examples of how language was used to represent underlying perspectives on justice and views on the role of government in providing for social welfare.

My focus on ethics reflects my commitment to preparing students with skills and tools for sound ethical decision-making for the complex issues they will face in practice. For example, in a graduate policy analysis course I provided students with content on ethical theory, empirical research on ethical decision making as well as applied decision-making frameworks. I asked students to work through an applied case study related to organizational policy to identify and justify their chosen courses of action, explicitly using the material discussed in preparation for the activity. Through my research, I aim to develop a better understanding of ethical decision-making processes in practice, which will inform my teaching. I also plan to develop curricula on ethics that can be integrated by colleagues into a range of social work courses.