

Teaching Experience and Training

My teaching philosophy is guided by principles of learning science (Ambrose, et al., 2010), backward course design (Fink, 2013), and the integration of mindfulness practices. Backward course design ensures that the primary learning objectives drive all aspects of curriculum design. As such, the syllabi that I design utilize weekly low-stakes scaffolding assignments that build toward a large, applied project. The research methods two-quarter syllabi that I designed using this backward design method has been adapted and utilized by several colleagues at my own and other institutions. I refined this syllabus over two years of teaching and collected weekly student feedback on course engagement and effectiveness to further improve it. For that class, I was recognized by the graduate school as having some of the highest teaching evaluations at the school of social work, and was nominated for two university teaching awards, receiving recognition as a finalist for an Excellence in Teaching Award in 2018.

I completed three courses in teaching, including one addressing the integration of mindfulness into pedagogical approaches, and a teaching practicum in a health practice MSW course. This year I am sole-teaching three MSW foundation courses: the two-course micro practice sequence and a policy course. I have previously taught two years of research methods as a sole instructor, and I have TA-ed or been course tutors for courses at the bachelor's (Macro Practice, Community Service Learning, Intro Statistics for psychology), MSW (Poverty and Inequality), and doctoral levels (statistics sequence), in addition to serving on three MSW thesis committees.

Pedagogical Learning Goal 1: Learn How to Learn

"This class challenged my ways of analyzing information not just pertaining to research but in all aspects of life including watching the news, reading the newspaper. It provided skills and challenged me to think more critically."

One of my primary goals in teaching is to teach students to be better learners through reflection and metacognition. The science of learning shows that learning can feel mysterious, and it can be hard to understand where we "went wrong." Similarly, experts can struggle to identify assumptions or break down complex tasks. When students learn to reflect, self-monitor, and explain their thinking, they direct their learning in more intentional ways. I apply these principles by reserving the final 10 minutes of each class for reflective journaling. Students reflect on their learning, apply concept or identify a knowledge gap in a brief journal write. In evaluations, students have stated that this daily practice is a useful barometer of their progress and needs, and it provides useful feedback for ongoing course adjustments.

Pedagogical Learning Goal 2: Practice Skills in Active Learning Situations

In learning science, we see that the more active and applicable we make learning activities, the greater the gains. In designing activities, I focus on the practical skills my students need in the field. When learning qualitative methods, my students read portions of transcripts, and practice coding and interpretation. When learning survey methods, they analyze data from a poorly

constructed survey and suggest improvements to the survey measures. I use mock job interviews to practice professionalism, and standardized client exercises to teach psychosocial assessment and motivational interviewing. In my research class, students design and execute their own research projects, which are later presented in a research conference to which faculty are invited. Final projects are submitted with a revision letter, mimicking the formal review process. Additionally, I have a student-favorite segment of class called “I’m pretty sure that’s ridiculous” in which the class critiques “research” circulating social media. Eventually students become so facile identifying questionable research that they supply the articles for critique; these opportunities create valuable real-world applications for their learning.

Pedagogical Learning Goal 3: Enact Social Justice and Critical Thinking

“Erin is a phenomenal professor! Her excitement for research is contagious, her explanations and lectures were so applicable... helpful to allow us to see the importance of research in the movement toward social justice and the field of social work. Also, her feedback was really helpful... One of the best I’ve had so far in the school of social work.”

As an instructor, I regularly encounter student beliefs that are inconsistent with the values of the social work profession. Whether the issue arises in course content (e.g. how to ethically capture demographics such as gender or race), classroom dynamics (e.g. privileged students dominating discourse), or office hours (e.g. students exploring personal values), I have these difficult, vital conversations often. I also model personal anti-oppression work. For instance, I once received student feedback about my use of the gendered term “you guys.” In response, I requested the class help increase my own awareness by putting their fingers on their noses when they noticed this behavior. Through this, I developed more inclusive language, and student evaluations reflected their appreciation for how I demonstrated my anti-oppression commitments in action.

By modeling critical thinking and providing opportunities for reflection and discussion, I engage students in their own identity development, and encourage action for social change. Ultimately, social justice is paramount to the social work discipline and a core personal value. I explore issues of power, privilege, oppression, and social action deliberately and frequently throughout each course. I apply principles of social justice by intentionally honoring different types of knowledges, incorporating readings from a diverse array of scholars, and consistently considering the social justice implications of course content. As a person who embodies many forms of privilege, I am committed to actively examining places where my positionality blinds me to the experiences of others. In this way, I see myself as a co-learner with my students. At the same time, I also recognize that my position as instructor is never neutral, and I must confront privilege and oppression when it appears in the classroom. Some of the most frequent student feedback I receive facilitate learning about how to work towards a more just society.

Each of these learning goals are intricately connected to social justice. First, I empower students to be self-directed learners. Second, I provide practice opportunities that apply to real life experiences. Third, I facilitate students’ identity development through critical thinking, with the ultimate goal of moving students to a place of action. In this way, I strive to better equip my students that that we may co-labor together towards a more just, equitable society.