

## Teaching Philosophy

Interdisciplinary and application-driven learning are at the core of my teaching strategy. As a seminar leader in Communication and Cultural Studies, I often leverage my experience as an interdisciplinarian and practice-based academic as a way to engage students. I bring the same epistemological positioning that drives my own practice into the classroom. This is done by utilizing my unique research praxis, which bridges disciplines and incorporates elements of cultural geography, creative studies, documentary studies and sociology, as a way to generate knowledge and engage with groups in and outside of academia.

Each student arrives in the classroom with a unique skill set ('tool-kit'), a skill set reflective of their past experiences and current settings. I actively encourage students to build upon these skills and to share them with their fellow students in a collaborative fashion. I believe it is important to not only instruct students but to inspire them, in previous seminars I've found graphing course content to their interests and not mine is a successful way to do so. As a result, I encourage them to let their interests drive them as they learn course content and complete assignments.

Through this process students are encouraged to think critically, to take risks, and to become comfortable with challenging their ideas and the ideas of others, while also being respectful of the diversity of opinions that exist within the classroom. The end goal of my teaching strategy is to transform my students into collaborative intellectuals, who feel empowered in and outside of the classroom.

In my ideal classroom learning is a collaborative venture between the instructor and their students, with each party having an equal responsibility to learn, disseminate content and play an active role in shaping the direction of the course. I approach my classroom as a lifelong learner, ready to be surprised, challenged, and make amendments to my epistemological point of view and beliefs. As an experienced Teaching Assistant in the Communication Department at York University, I am responsible for leading weekly seminars, the majority of grading and assignment creation, and meeting with students during office hours. I diligently follow the development of students as they progress through each stage of the yearlong course, making interventions when necessary to support the academic success of each student.

Through in-class assignments I ask students from different disciplines to enter into a constructive dialogue. As a result of these assignments students challenge their own positions and develop a personal voice. This is predominantly achieved through the use of digital media as a relatable and interactive teaching tool. My pedagogical approaches are also innovated by my roles as a guest publisher with the independent publishing house *The Velvet Cell* and as a guest editor with *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*. As a scholar interested in theory, but grounded by my professional practice in publishing photography, my

work as a teacher and researcher is motivated by a desire to strengthen, connect and cultivate the artistic and photographic community in Western Canada.

My experience as a teaching assistant at Canada's most ethically and culturally diverse university has taught me the importance of practicing accountability and reciprocity in the classroom. I believe in a policy of openness, which reduces classroom power dynamics, makes me self-reflective in my role and position of privilege within the classroom, and how that might affect learning. However, it is important to note that as an instructor I am aware of the limitations of the classroom and the difficulty in guaranteeing one specific and prescriptive student learning experience. I can only plan for a specific kind of learning experience— one that is multifaceted, inclusive and flexible.

In addition to establishing a classroom contract at the beginning of each semester, I ask my students to anonymously fill out mid-semester 'progress reports'. This is done in order to evaluate which learning approaches are most effective for the student body. Asking my students to assess the level of effectiveness of my teaching methods increases accountability and helps me make changes to the instructional style if required. For example, through the progress reports students expressed that multi-media and contemporary and non-western case studies were effective ways to engage with course content. Utilizing this feedback, I was able to package additional course content within multimedia examples. This content resonated with students and their interests, contributing to the accessibility and active learning environment of the classroom. In addition to helping shape class structure and content, the progress reports are used to hold students accountable. The reports ask students to rate themselves in a number of categories, including student preparedness, engagement, and assignments ultimately encouraging students to reflect upon their responsibilities as an active member of the classroom learning community.