

Teaching Statement

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My work as a teacher, researcher, and curator is unified by my mission to create open and inclusive learning spaces for students. As a low-income, first-generation college student myself, I often experienced the feeling “I don’t belong here.” My approach to teaching always includes a focus on how positionality contributes to learning and meaning-making processes. The classroom should be an accessible space that allows learners to make personally relevant connections to subjects in their own way, to discover things about themselves, and develop new ways to understand the world and other identities, societies, and communities. My own path to German Studies has been non-traditional, intercultural, and interdisciplinary; my immediate paternal family are ethnic Germans from Ukraine—some of whom were able to flee during the Second World War, others deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan for forced labor. I am the first person in my family to attend university, and I had a 10-year career in elementary education, yoga instruction, and fine art before returning to academia. My very first teaching experience was as a lead instructor for an arts program for teens of underrepresented communities in Greeley, Colorado. I recognized that feeling of “not belonging” in many of those students. I also saw engagement happen when they worked together with and through art to pull down perceived barriers, uplifting their own uniqueness and creative power.

Today, my classroom is a learner-centered environment; my approach to teaching is informed by many years of curriculum development for individualized education as well as feminist pedagogies that value de-hierarchizing the classroom. My teaching values individual styles—normative and non-normative—and encourages personal investment. I do my best to model this on day one. When I introduce myself to my students, I share my teaching and research, as well as my personal history and non-traditional academic journey. One of the first projects I assign is an [Identitätsdiagramm](#). I make an effort to learn about my students’ academic and personal interests, inviting them to share freely in writing or during introductory office hour visits, the latter of which I require. Most recently, my pedagogical practice has been inspired by Dr. Eugenia Zuroski’s “[Where do you know from](#)” exercise, which aims to create “productive spaces for thinking together across difference” and establish “mutual responsibility to respect the complexities of how we relate to one another as we learn with and from each other.”

My students are encouraged to learn by building on the knowledge and experience they bring with them to the classroom. Before I introduce new topics, I ask my students to share what they know and what they would like to learn. Meaningful participation in the classroom also happens when students are afforded opportunities to engage directly with their particular fields of study and other interests. Recognizing each student’s unique contributions, learning styles, and needs helps me design structured, yet flexible lessons, tailored to the semester’s set of objectives and the student’s own self-exploration.

I recognize that each class has its own particular dynamic and needs. To this end, I conduct mid-semester teaching evaluations and alter my teaching accordingly. All of these practices, informed and reinforced by the teaching workshops and diversity training I have attended, have resulted in student success. My most recent students have given me superlative instructor ratings, stating mine was the “best language class I’ve taken,” that I am “very patient with the different learning speeds of [my] students” and that I “made everyone feel comfortable having fun while learning.” These statements speak to my quality as a teacher; the subtext, however, speaks to the respect, care, and inclusivity these students work to create. I am invested in my students’ academic growth and success. Important to me as well, is that students know me as an instructor who “cares a lot about her students.”