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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Crafting an ideal teaching environment has always been a task whose calculus could best be exemplified in the creation of music in a wind ensemble. Having spent almost a decade sitting within the rows of a band, I recognized that the success and quality of our performances were an intricate and dynamic relationship between our conductor and the many students who sat in front, besides, and behind us as we transitioned from melody to melody. My approach to teaching reflects that of the conductor whose role is only as meaningful as the learners who partake in the experience. Teaching within my discipline of Latinx Studies affords an interdisciplinary approach to nourish a critical outlook of the world my students reside in. To achieve this ideal classroom space, I employ the following components to a teaching style that fosters dynamic student learning: 1) a sense of community facilitated through a collaborative learning environment between the students and myself, 2) a classroom space that will allow for students to be their authentic selves and have that represented within the class content, and 3) the development of a methodological and theoretical toolbox what will assist students in thinking about the topics associated with Latinx Studies through an interdisciplinary approach.

My first goal of an ideal classroom environment, that of a community established through collaborative learning, is probably best described through a personal experience rather than a set of guidelines. I used to mentor and tutor for a program whose goal was to guide and assist first-year undergraduate students as they transitioned into a college environment. For the first year of my involvement with the program, the tutoring component approached this task through a rather traditional style that entailed students attending tutoring hours where they could then ask questions one-on-one. The following year, the director of the program decided to adjust this environment to one defined by a philosophy of collaborative learning. Instead of a relationship between student and tutor that involved the tutor telling the student how to answer certain assignment problems, the students were placed into groups when they attended collaborative study hours and worked through their assignments with one another. The tutor then served primarily as a guide, a conductor, when the group happened to need assistance. While the students pushed back against this change with a bit of discomfort, they eventually saw material results in their abilities to teach and communicate ideas to their peers which often translated into a higher performance on classroom exams.

Much like an ensemble that is in sync, a collaborative learning space allows for an environment where the conductor, or in this case the classroom instructor, to step off of the podium and allow for the students to learn from and with each other. Classroom assignments I attend to implement for such atmosphere involves small group discussion and in-class presentations. While class might often be a mix between lecture and activity, it is within the latter that collaboration will be highlighted. Small group discussions allow for an increase in student participation that works off of the philosophy that all students are capable of learning from each other as they are from my lecture component of the course. Furthermore, an in-class

group presentation on a reading or set of readings that are not assigned to everyone in class allows for students to communicate ideas with one another, question each other's approaches, and speak from a position of expertise that is often not embodied within a classroom setting.

The second goal for an ideal classroom environment is a sense of belonging. My own identities as a first-generation, queer Latinx person has provided me with experiences of being in classrooms where feelings of belonging and alienation were not uncommon. It is with this goal that I hope to not only allow students to feel affirmed, but to challenge any preconceived notions about what my classroom may be. Teaching on topics that have to do with ethno-racial identities, gender, sexuality, and class can often bring in both students who might have never discussed such themes within a classroom setting and those that might embody one or more of the represented identities and therefore feel as if they possess more of a position as expert as opposed to one that allows for growth. As a media, specifically a digital media scholar, I view media as a powerful tool to facilitate this relationship between belonging and intellectual growth. Getting to know the media my students regularly consume would allow me to incorporate them into lectures and activities. This approach can facilitate a sense of belonging as students would feel represented, yet by placing such media texts through a critical lens, students will often be placed in positions where their values and ways of knowing are challenged.

These objectives rest on the dynamics of participation fostered within the classroom. I wish to establish environments where students feel welcomed to participate, yet recognize that this is not always ideal for some students. Creating multiple ways of participation will help students feel involved even if traditional forms of class participation feels inaccessible. These can include, but are not limited to, discussion posts through an online system, discussion in office hours, or post-class reflections. However, students will hopefully see the benefits of in-class participation and will at least once be challenged to practice and cultivate this skill through class presentations.

The final learning outcome of my classes should be the critical toolbox that the students develop which allow them to sense the world with a different faculty. A diversity of assignments that goes beyond essays and includes groups projects, presentations, and pre-approved, negotiated products such as a digital media object, zine, podcast-like interview and discussion, (auto)ethnographic paper, or creative nonfiction writing that incorporates class material are some of the ways I envision allowing students to employ the theoretical and methodological approaches to Latinx Studies. For many students, particularly those approaching the discipline for the first time in lower-division courses might not be secure in taking a critical framework developed around issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, etc. outside of the classroom. Through class readings and assignments, I hope to pull from current events and media that students consume to guide them in taking the crafted toolbox with them once the last note is played at the conclusion of the course.