

Amanda Nell Edgar
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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

When considering whether to hold class on a particularly icy day in central Missouri, one of my mentors reminded me that “we teach the whole person, not just their role in the classroom.” While he was specifically referencing students’ physical safety in traveling through inclement weather, I take his meaning more broadly. The professor’s role is not only to guide students through our field’s knowledge, but also to understand them as people who leave our classrooms and enter all sorts of contexts, situations, hopes, disappointments, and lived experiences. I have worked to uphold this perspective and to communicate it to my students across all of my courses, specifically foregrounding the learning process, highlighting connections outside the classroom, and communicating my care for student success and well-being.

Foregrounding the Learning Process

The portfolio was really interesting because all the aspects that are vital to Media and Info Literacy were compiled into one extensive project. I liked how we had choices on most weeks because it allowed students to find ideas that they connected with the most. It also helped connect course ideas with life outside of the classroom which was a huge positive. And spreading it out over each week helped to have a better grasp on that week’s lesson. (Media and Information Literacy, fall 2016)

You were very aware of the subject being taught. You took a creative approach with everything we did in the class which made it very interesting to learn. From the dice determining if we took a quiz to our mini projects. As a student, you can tell that each part of the course was thought out strategically with the students in mind. (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, spring 2016)

After my first year at the University of Memphis, I noticed that students had learned in my classroom, but their SETEs sometimes showed that they were not aware of their learning. The scores on two items related to semester-long learning and assessment were not as high as I had hoped, particularly in Media and Information Literacy, a core departmental course. In order to make sure they were as aware as I was of their learning, I implemented a portfolio assignment. Throughout the semester, I asked students to apply the materials we were learning in ways that would specifically connect those topics to their lives. For example, to demonstrate the impact of media conglomeration on our lives, I asked them to list 10 television shows they or others they know were watching. Then, they went through a series of prompts to determine which of these were owned by which of the “big 6” media companies. Other weeks, they took the Implicit Biases Test and reflected on their results, or interviewed a professional working in local media. At the end of the semester, I asked students to bring their portfolios to class, and they shared with one another about what they had learned. Immediately, I noticed an improvement in how students understood their skills. While they had gained the same skills as previous classes, by having them practice these skills, then evaluate their own growth, they were more aware of the why and how I was evaluating them. They were able to see their semester long growth, as well as areas in which they lagged behind peers, which helped to make the learning process more tangible for them.

Foregrounding the process and overarching trajectory of student learning helps them to move forward from my class with a keener eye to academic and personal growth in other courses and areas of their lives.

Highlighting Connections Outside the Classroom

Dr. Edgar facilitated one of my most memorable and influential classes this semester. I loved how I was able to connect this class to classes in my major. I really loved the class structure and how the tests were designed because now I feel like I really know and will retain what I have learned. She gets nothing but positivity from me! (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, fall 2017)

I really enjoyed how Dr. Edgar made this course relatable and applicable to our lives. She allowed for class participation and input which helped with the learning process. Overall, this was my favorite class of the semester. (Media and Information Literacy, fall 2016)

Central to my teaching philosophy is the idea that course materials should inform the ways students understand and navigate their worlds. The connection between course materials and the outside world is, like student learning, sometimes more apparent to us as professors than it is to students. One way I demonstrate the relationships between topics and students' lives is to ask students to select topics that speak to their academic and personal interests.

The last project in my Rhetoric of Popular Culture course, for example, asks students to propose a topic for discussion that we did not cover but that should have been included on the syllabus. I have often incorporated particularly strong topics into future courses, and I share this with them when I introduce the assignment. I leave the assignment intentionally broad, asking only that they connect something they have learned about rhetoric of popular culture with the topic they choose. Leaving the assignment open has resulted in a wonderful assortment of ideas ranging from Disney princesses and GIF reactions (both of which I incorporated into future classes) to slam poetry, popular novels, Asian-American stereotypes, and slang dialects. This assignment is structured as a presentation, allowing individual students to dig into the connection of rhetoric to their lives and others to see how this connection applies in a wide variety of ways.

The assignment therefore is mutually beneficial. It encourages students to think about how the concepts of rhetoric and lived culture relate to their own interests while also providing me with insight into the most important artifacts in their lives. In this way, my course is able to tap into the constant struggle of popular culture, while more clearly speaking to my students' outside lives.

Communicating My Care for Student Success and Well-Being

Dr. Edgar is an outstanding instructor. She is kind, knowledgeable, and helpful. She [sic] has a genuine concern for her students and their progress in the course. I would love to take another course from her in the future. (Media and Information Literacy, fall 2016)

She's always willing to help students with their projects. She'll make time to speak with students if they wish to do so. She listens to students concerns and tries to help them cope. She takes into account students' possible interest when determining the material for the course. (Cultural Studies Graduate Seminar, spring 2017)

Our students are often facing real difficulties beyond the classroom, navigating economic conditions in which they must work full-time jobs to support their families, and transition into an incredibly competitive job market. I arrive early to each class period and ask how students are doing, then speak with specific students and/or pose follow-up questions about things like course loads, work expectations, sleep, and stress. Sometimes sharing is enough to help, and sometimes I can recommend various campus resources. Either way, I believe that care for the well-being of the whole student facilitates classroom success.

My approach in this area is not separate from academic rigor. For example, in chatting with graduate students before my spring 2016 graduate seminar, I noticed a good deal of anxiety surrounding publishing expectations. In my experience, anxiety is not particularly useful for learning or writing. I decided to build in a publishing element to my spring 2017 seminar. In the course structure, students worked through Wendy Belcher's guide to journal article publishing, a book that offers practical ways of approaching the process. I also began class by discussing tips for the writing process, and sharing some of the more opaque aspects of publishing, such as reviewer feedback and anecdotes from experienced Communication publishers. My goal was not to rid anxiety from publishing; that would be quite a feat. Rather, I aimed to offer some concrete ways of approaching something that is both intimidating and increasingly necessary for graduate students. At the same time, this approach facilitated a rigorous course that pushed many beyond what they imagined they could do.

I value the opportunity to engage students in discussing their frustrations and concerns. An awareness of students' experiences outside the classroom is an asset to course design and instruction, and I work hard to make sure I am listening to my students and adapting to their needs while still maintaining rigorous expectations.

Conclusion

Writing in the margins of her exam, one of my fall 2017 students wrote "You are the first professor who has valued all of the intersections of my identity, and I am forever grateful for that." This is one of the highest compliments of my career thus far. For me, rigorous academic standards are supported by and support a genuine caring for students as whole people. In approaching my courses in this way, I believe I am actively encouraging those in my classes to engage with Communication both as an academic field and as a way of understanding their place in the world.

Qualitative Evidence

Sample Responses from Student Evaluations

Getting Students Engaged

“Positive outlook is contagious. I felt like i wanted to know more about the subject because she wanted and liked to teach it.” (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, fall 2017)

“Dr. Edgar is extremely knowledgeable about this subject as evidenced by the mini-lecture material. Admittedly, I didn` t have much of an interest in this subject prior to enrolling in the class. It took me a couple of chapters to really get into it but I attribute her mini-lecture and discussion board topics to completely turning it around for me. I liked having the feedback board as another place to communicate and get further clarification.” (Media and Information Literacy, online, spring 2018)

“very enthusiastic about the course, very friendly, used very interesting and fun topics, made the class so interesting and fun that I was disappointed to be done. I wish I could take this course again for credits. It was super fun! I loved the videos. Dr. Edgar was awesome!!” (Media and Information Literacy, online, spring 2018)

Organizing and Structuring Courses

“I love Dr. Edgar. She was so organized and always stayed on topic. She made sure we understood what she was teaching and made it very relatable so it was more interesting. Loved the class and the professor!!” (Media and Information Literacy, fall 2017)

“Very organized and informative course. The quizzes and reading checks were quite helpful in knowing what to study, as well as the lecture notes. The lecture printouts were also helpful in following along during lectures. I enjoyed this class.” (Media and Information Literacy, fall 2017)

“I can honestly say that Prof. Edgar is one of the most passionate professors in the Communication Department. Her courses are always clean cut and relevant to mainstream application. She is young, hip, and her teaching style is refreshing.” (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, fall 2017)

Offering Straightforward Explanations

“Really good at making lessons interesting. She is very straightforward in her teaching style. Very understanding of circumstances.” (Media and Information Literacy, fall 2016)

“She was genuinely interested in the topics that she was teaching and went out of her way to find outside material that was relevant to our lessons that would help to relate it back to us. Definitely an effective teacher, made things as easy to understand as possible and facilitated a fun learning environment.” (Media and Information Literacy, spring 2018)

“Very kind, organized, stayed on topic, very practical teaching that challenged the students to apply it to their actual life, and open to opinion and is able to share her own.” (Media and Information Literacy, fall 2016)

Crafting Enjoyable Projects

“I love Professor Edgar as a person and a teacher. She is very engaging and came up with really interesting projects for us to do to apply the media and identity theories we learned in class. I would take one of her other classes if I ever got the opportunity.” (Honors Forum, fall 2017)

“The portfolio was really interesting because all the aspects that are vital to Media and Info Literacy were compiled into one extensive project. I liked how we had choices on most weeks because it allowed students to find ideas that they connected with the most. It also helped connect course ideas with life outside of the classroom which was a huge positive. And spreading it out over each week helped to have a better grasp on that week’s lesson.” (Media and Information Literacy, fall 2016)

“The assignments were unique and engaging--an excellent way to teach this subject. You were an enthusiastic and knowledgeable professor. I had trouble grasping the purpose and application of rhetoric at first, but you taught it very well and I now have a good understanding of it. I really enjoyed this class.” (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, spring 2016)

Making Content Relatable

“I really enjoyed how Dr. Edgar made this course relatable and applicable to our lives. She allowed for class participation and input which helped with the learning process. Overall, this was my favorite class of the semester.” (Media and Information Literacy, fall 2016)

“This class is hard, but Dr. Edgar is the best professor in the COMM department. She is relatable and funny, and she takes teaching seriously.” (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, fall 2016)

“She made this class interesting for everyone and included many different aspects concerning the study of rhetorical analysis. This made it so the class didn’t get boring or repetitive.” (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, spring 2016)

“There was some really dense material but the professor was able to make it easier to understand and interesting during every lecture. She really cares about the students and if they understand the lessons. Extremely knowledgeable about the subject.” (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, fall 2016)

Demonstrating Care for Students

“She is a great professor. She really takes time to actually teach the material in a fun way. She is always energized.” (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, fall 2016)

“Dr. Edgar is one of the best professors I’ve ever had. She’s very involved and enthusiastic. She genuinely cares if her students grasp the material. I would highly suggest her to anyone!” (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, fall 2016)

“Very passionate about the subject. Listened to students’ opinions on different subjects, and actively interacted with students during class.” (Rhetoric of Pop Culture, spring 2016)

Quantitative Evidence
 Overall Teaching Effectiveness:
 University of Missouri Student Evaluations

Semester	Course Title	Evaluation Score¹	Dept. Mean²
Fall 2018	Rhetoric of Pop Culture	TBD	TBD
	Graduate Seminar in Feminist Media Studies	TBD	TBD
	Honors Forum (Audiences)	TBD	TBD
Spring 2018	Media and Information Literacy	4.70	4.33
	Media and Information Literacy (online)	4.91	4.33
Fall 2017	Media and Information Literacy	4.91	4.31
	Rhetoric of Pop Culture	4.57	4.39
	Honors Forum (Audiences)	4.70	4.58
Spring 2017	Graduate Seminar in Cultural Studies	4.50	4.73
Fall 2016	Media and Information Literacy	4.73	4.33
	Media and Information Literacy	4.80	4.30
Spring 2016	Media and Information Literacy	4.54	4.39
	Rhetoric of Pop Culture	4.71	4.38
	Graduate Seminar in Sound Studies	5.00	4.71
Fall 2015	Media and Information Literacy	4.57	4.32
	Rhetoric of Pop Culture	4.86	4.64
	Oral Communication	3.54	4.32
	Oral Communication (online hybrid)	3.58	4.32
Spring 2015	Message Design and Writing for Media	4.95	4.52
	Public Speaking (Honors)	4.47	4.46
Fall 2014	Television Criticism	4.76	4.21
	Public Speaking	4.64	4.42
Spring 2014	Message Design and Writing for Media	4.38	4.38
	Television Criticism	4.52	4.35

¹ The student evaluation item reported here is general teaching effectiveness. Students respond to this item using a 5-point scale with 1 being the lowest score possible.

² The item reported here is the department mean for courses at a comparable level. For example, for Media and Information Literacy (COMM 2101), I have reported the mean score on general teaching effectiveness across all 2000-level courses.