

Dustin Hixenbaugh
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

In my ten years as an educator, I have taught many different courses to an array of students at the high school, college, and professional levels. My diverse experiences have confirmed for me that the point of education is to prepare *individuals* to participate in *communities*. Whether I am teaching literature, composition, instructional methods, or any other subject, I know that I am doing my job correctly if I am leading my students to see that they are crucial members of communities that cut across lines of difference and using the content that I am teaching them to impact their communities in positive ways. My teaching philosophy hinges on my respect for diversity and my commitment to designing classes that empower students to serve themselves and their communities.

As a reader of literature, I am drawn to texts that broaden my perspective on the world. As a scholar, I examine authors who use literature as a pedagogical instrument to influence the beliefs and practices of their communities. In my classes, I unite my love for diverse texts and my attention to their literary and historical contexts to help students grasp the power of the written word. In a literature class, this can mean assigning texts that document lives that history has silenced, while in a composition class, it can mean requiring students to analyze opinions they do not understand and to express their own opinions in a variety of formats. Of course, I am also attentive to and humbled by the diversity of my students' lives and talents. Even in a class like "The Rhetoric of Country Music," I strive to bring to the fore marginalized worldviews and lead my students to discuss how cultural products as apparently benign as music can be used to liberate or oppress the people who consume them. As often as I can, I plan lessons that eschew lecture. Rather, I invite students to participate in spirited conversations among themselves and to reach their own conclusions about the texts and concepts that we explore. I can easily attest to the cliché that as a teacher I learn as much from my students as they learn from me, though I prefer to think that we are all doing our learning together.

I ensure that learning experiences are student- and community-focused by designing assignments that invite students to apply their learning to the world outside the classroom. For one example, while directing the summer school program at Sam Houston Math, Science, and Technology Center (a high school serving mostly low-income students) in Houston, Texas, in 2013, I encouraged instructors in all content areas to teach their students how experts use the same skills students were practicing to resolve real-world problems. At the end of the term, we invited the local community to a fair where students used their expertise to identify and propose remedies for a host of problems in the school, neighborhood, and city. In my own classes, I have increasingly utilized technology to empower students to voice their opinions and complete works of public scholarship. The best example of this is the blog I established for the "Rhetoric of Country Music" class. Over the course of the semester, students publish several original essays, including petitions suggesting new inductees to the Country Music Hall of Fame, and they use the comments section to offer each other support and suggestions for improvement. That blogging strengthens my students' writing I know from the depth of research they are willing to undertake for their articles and the consistent excellence of their work. That blogging also opens opportunities for them beyond my class I know from their stories about landing internships and other positions partly because their resumes include blogging for a university-sponsored website and their experience using the WordPress software.

I have been fortunate to have been recognized several times for my teaching. However, if I had to explain what makes my teaching strong, I would simply say that I am invested in my students. No matter who they are or what experiences and abilities they bring with them, I respect them, I encourage them to take risks, and I take great joy in seeing them achieve their dreams.