

## **Teaching Philosophy** **Angela Laflen, Ph.D.**

My philosophy of teaching might more properly be referred to as a philosophy of learning. For me, learning and teaching are inseparably intertwined, and I actively learn in my classroom alongside my students. In part, this is a necessity since my scholarship and teaching focus on writing, rhetoric, and technology. Writing and rhetoric have expanded throughout my career to include new genres, new methods, and new literacies in step with the pace of technological change. As a result, I continually adapt my pedagogy and course content to address these changes. Today, I regard myself as a partner with my students. They teach me about ever-changing applications, technologies, and genres, and I provide for them a framework to critically engage technology, informed by rhetorical principals and theories. To create this kind of learning environment I pursue a set of common principles in all of my courses, adapting my pedagogy to meet the needs of varying student populations. These principles are (1) situating student work in scholarly, civic, and professional communities, (2) challenging students to adapt to new or changing contexts, and (3) respecting diversity while maintaining fairness.

1) Helping students to situate their work in larger scholarly, civic, and professional communities: I believe that it is important for students to learn about the power of their ideas to impact readers and effect change, and I foster this learning by providing opportunities to write for authentic audiences and real-world contexts. Community-based learning projects are one pivotal way that I provide these opportunities for students. I partner with local area not-for-profit organizations in all of my professional writing courses, and students learn about the organizations through guest lectures, site visits, and field research with the organization and in the community. During the Spring of 2016, for example, students in my Technical Writing course conducted research on mental health issues in Poughkeepsie, NY, as part of a partnership with Mental Health America Dutchess County. They were able to directly impact the Marist and local communities when they organized a campus event as part of Mental Health Month and shared their work via research infographics.

2) Challenging students to flexibly adapt their skills in new or changing contexts: I believe that students need to be prepared to negotiate multiple linguistic, cultural, and technological differences, and to recognize that they have numerous ways to approach unfamiliar texts and writing contexts. Thus I provide opportunities in my courses for students to practice using new writing tools and engage unfamiliar genres so they have the chance to adapt and expand on the reading, writing, and research skills they already possess. In the core Literature and Gender course that I teach, I focus on graphic narratives, which helps students expand their traditional reading strategies to closely read and analyze multimodal texts. Additionally, I sought to expand this opportunity by allowing students to practice multimodal writing and research while studying the genre. To achieve this goal, I worked with a team of colleagues at Marist to build a pedagogical resource called the Graphic Narrative Database (GND) that provides an alternative medium for student research. The GND is comprised of students' own multimodal research articles, each of which is focused on one graphic narrative. By focusing on the hybrid literary form of graphic narratives and asking students to produce multimodal research articles about these texts, I seek to help students reflect on their own literacy practices and to think about what demonstrating rhetorical reading might look like in digital spaces unbound by the

traditional conventions of print research essays.

3) Respecting Diversity and Maintaining Fairness: I expect my students to be open-minded and receptive to new and sometimes uncomfortable ideas. I foster this principal in the classroom by continually modeling this expectation and demonstrating my own commitment to diversity and fairness. I strive to cultivate a comfortable learning environment in which students are able to express their needs and opinions and where all students can better learn from one another as a result. To achieve this, I actively listen to students voicing opinions or interpretations with which I disagree and value students with differing levels of physical and intellectual ability and learning styles. I also view the classroom as a place where students are learning to engage in civil discourse, so it is important for all students to have the opportunity to participate in class discussions even when doing so requires drawing out quieter students. In my first-year writing course, for example, I designate particular days “graded discussion” days, when I document students who contribute to a class discussion on our assigned reading for the day. This allows quieter students time to prepare for class discussion and to contribute to it. Additionally, when disagreements or tensions arise during class discussion, I take the chance to talk about options for expressing and responding to strongly held opinions and beliefs. In their course evaluations, students frequently note my enthusiastic attitude toward other students and my eagerness to engage the entire class in discussion.

As I have gained experience in the classroom, I have realized that creating a classroom environment in which learning can occur is critical to fostering lifetime learning objectives. However, creating this environment is challenging in practice, requiring constant refinement and adaptation for each new class of students and each different learning environment, including face-to-face, online, and hybrid courses. As I develop and teach a range of courses in rhetoric and composition, professional writing, and gender and literature, I ensure that my courses connect to larger values by keeping in mind the principles of helping students to situate their work in larger communities, challenging them to flexibly adapt their skills in new or changing contexts, and respecting diversity and maintaining fairness. As a co-learner with my students, I know that I have succeeded in effectively scaffolding a course when I am learning alongside my students.