

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Ethnographic work involves an intimate understanding of everyday lives and the participation of individuals who voluntarily provide us with their experience and perspective. As researchers, we have certain basic responsibilities. These primarily include the need to treat people with honor and respect, to appreciate diverse opinions and backgrounds, and to understand what we see and hear within personal, social, and greater historical contexts. This approach is a fundamentally important in an effective classroom, particularly as higher education becomes progressively multicultural. It is my responsibility to impress upon students the centrality of an informed, broadminded engagement with individuals and groups who may possess ways of making meaning that are different from their own. This is what it means to be an educated and responsible person not only in the field of anthropology but also more generally.

Orienting students to the discipline involves not only addressing core ideas and discussing important traditions of the field but also exploring the intellectual and social history of its development as a context for understanding current practice and contemporary debate over its meaning and future direction. Students need to know where anthropology fits within the universe of other approaches to understanding a variety of social problems. I believe this is essential for improving the education of students in the discipline. For anthropology to remain relevant in the lives of students and to gain footing in the forum of public debate over key social issues, as a teacher I need to guide the learning of an anthropological perspective through greater engagement with real world problems. This allows students to see the potential value of its particular outlook and methods to their own lives. This insight can be achieved through the application of theory and method in individual and group projects designed as illustrations of the kind of research anthropologists routinely take on.

I believe that it is the responsibility of a good teacher to encourage students to further develop their own observational skills and an attention to fine details. These skills are essential to effective analysis and critical thinking. Students should be encouraged to carefully record what they are learning not only in the classroom but also in the course of their novice research while learning to apply and evaluate different explanatory models and theories. Together these skills provide a perspective for framing and understanding the world that is basic to anthropology's holistic vision. The importance of sharing this vision is a fundamental part of my philosophy of teaching. I believe passionately that the approach we must take, as responsible citizens, to solving contemporary problems is one that acknowledges and explores cultural, linguistic, historical, and ecological/biological dimensions of the human condition. This is why I support a four-field approach to the teaching of anthropology that also positions the discipline, in a complementary way, amid other fields engaged with these problems in order to show the interconnectivity of ideas and knowledge about people and culture.

I have learned in the field as a practicing cultural anthropologist in five years of fieldwork in three different ethnographic projects that we have a basic responsibility to listen first. The same is true for the effective teacher. I am open to emergent qualities of working from the "bottom" up as I search for patterns that connect with or perhaps challenge existing models or theory. As ethnographers, we take on a role akin to a student or apprentice as we learn from the people we study. There are certainly presuppositions, but these can become empirical questions to be tested in the course of our learning. Immersed in the everyday lives of a group or family as the subject of our research, we are ready to rethink and continuously adjust our approach in response to ongoing feedback. During the course of teaching in the classroom environment, an effective teacher mimics this process of listening, searching for pattern, making connections, expressing his or her own understanding of what is seen and heard, and

continuously adjusting to feedback. This is part of the process of evaluating the effectiveness of my teaching. For good ethnographers and teachers, this is how it is done.

In so doing, the teacher provides an example of what is required for anthropological research. I believe a teacher should serve as a kind of mentor. Although leadership is often emphasized in teaching, my approach is one of informed guidance. This emphasizes the importance of collaboration and recognizing the unique combination of experiences and knowledge that each class represents. It is a matter of respect for the differences brought by diversity and the potential contributions particular to each individual. It is the skill of a teacher and mentor to recognize and encourage these contributions and to find ways that each person's unique skill and background can be shared to enhance everyone's learning experience. By knowing and understanding individual students through interaction in and outside the classroom, a teacher should help them develop greater self-confidence in their own ability to think through and respond to intellectual and real world problems with their own solutions. Serving as a clear example of this process through showing my struggles to make meaning both in the collaborative context of the classroom as well as my experiences while conducting research, I strive to become a mentor. This is why I always explain carefully to students why I want to convey certain information, ask them to read a particular text, or perform some activity – I respect and support students by being explicit about my intent.

I believe in being part of the solution for providing students with ways of integrating practical subjects with those areas of study that enrich the mind and spirit. It appears that too often students are conflicted over a perceived choice between the practical and material needs of the world of work and the spiritual, artistic, or moral needs of the person. This is why I support learning in an institution that holds as basic to its mission providing a reflective, tolerant and engaged environment for the critical exchange of ideas united with an organized, dynamic program committed to real world problems.

I am passionate about learning. Having obtained my doctorate is evidence of my love of ideas and for making meaningful connections between abstract theory and real world problems. It is also evidence of determination. I am wholly determined to share this passion through teaching. Having learned and experienced a great deal over the course of my life through formal education and my own personal journeys of self-discovery, I feel it is my responsibility to give back through helping to prepare young people for careers, of course, but more importantly for life. For students destined for fields both in and outside academia, I want them to find fulfilling ways of contributing to an increasing need for skilled analysts and researchers with sharp critical thinking skills who, like anthropologists, have learned to manage, evaluate, and interpret large volumes of different kinds of data on human behavior. Today's world depends on flexibility. It is a mantra of the post-industrial, service economy. Cultural anthropologists learn to be at ease in unexpected situations. Similarly, the contemporary world requires knowledgeable people who have the ability to confidently adapt and apply their knowledge to new situations. In a world of increasing diversity and complexity, I am committed to fostering greater personal flexibility, broad, open, and global perspectives, holistic knowledge, and the desire to solve human-ecological problems with a culturally sensitive style.