

### Teaching Philosophy:

I see learning as oriented by at least three commitments. The first is a commitment to *critical practice*. I want my students to excavate often unarticulated, implicit, sometimes unconsciously held assumptions that structure my views, their own views, that of their society, and others' views of the world. I encourage my students to engage with the presuppositions that *motivate* their actions, the epistemological frameworks through which they *interpret* phenomena, and the *justifications* with which people explain or legitimize their actions. Such a task involves a careful articulation of the personal and the public. I want my students to recognize the extent to which what they often view as purely personal is in fact deeply inflected by their society.

To think critically is an entry into learning as a dialectical dance. The dance of learning is a rigorous discipline and its movements are a study in the sciences of precision – definition, meter, syntax, punctuation, date, time, event, space, volume, unit, repetition, multiplication. And yet learning outstrips the calculus of instrumentalization, breaks past square choreographies of role and genre, objectives and outcomes, facts and figures. The dance of learning is a leap into serendipity and chance, it thrills with imaginative improvisation, it is a wondrous risk into the fortuitous and the unforeseen. Learning can lift with dazzling clarity, cutting clean through and out of the tenacious grip of commonsense, conventional wisdom, self-deception, propaganda, formulas, tradition. But, just as often, learning is a graceful surrender to the enfoldments of ambiguity, paradox, polysemy, and complexity. To learn, then, is the embodied dialectic of the propositional with the performative, *knowledge that* and *knowledge how*.

Second, learning involves a commitment to the classroom as a space for *encounter*.

Such an encounter often involves trying to understand the alien, the foreign, the disagreeable. On the one hand, I want my students to wrestle with Terence's maxim: "*Nihil humani a me alienum puto.*" (*Nothing human is alien to me*). One interpretation of Terence's maxim is that it is a critique of presumptions of "innocence" and "purity"; the common human delusion that evil is only to be found in the Other and not in us. In other words, Terence is pointing out that "we" or "our" society are just as capable, and perhaps just as complicit, in unspeakable acts of cruelty and injustice. In my view, Terence's maxim emphasizes the importance of wrestling with the difficulties of understanding. But on the other hand, I want my students to also grasp how much about ourselves and others is a mystery and how the future is often unpredictable and surprising. This is why I make space in my classroom not only for verbal communication, but also for the nonverbal, the non-discursive, even at times, for meditative silence.

Third, learning is a commitment to the articulation of agency. I want my students to conceive of education as an exercise in the imagination of ethical alternatives in a world that too often falsely claims an "end to history." Against the pressures of careerism, curricula "relevance," technical efficiency, scientism, and marketplace utilitarianism, I want my students to imagine a world of solidarity, justice, truth, play, pleasure, the uncanny, the sublime, and the beautiful. But I also want my students to recognize not only possibility, but limits as well. Certainly this consists in recognizing that others have agency and autonomy as well. Thus, ethical relationships emerge in and through a critique of paternalism. At other times this may consist in understanding that the struggle for self-making and social-making is often risky, slow, difficult, frustrating. Often, even, it ends in failure. And yet, for all that, when articulated and informed by the

dialectic of social justice, agency is irreducible to the calculus of “success” and “failure”:  
it is nothing less than the emergence and realization of meaning. Such at least is the hope  
I want to leave my students with at the end of every class session.