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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

In communication courses, we ask students to take up some of the most fundamental aspects of everyday life — what media we consume and use, how we form opinions and make decisions, what norms structure our daily performances and interactions, how we create and maintain social circles — as objects of analysis. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to motivate students to ask critical questions about the role media and communication play in everyday life: how do media representations shape our understandings of ourselves and of people who are different from us? What communication strategies can we use to inspire change? Can communication technologies help us foster community and solidarity? My goal is not only to give students a firm grounding in the methods and theories that help us answer these questions, but also to push students toward using everyday communication platforms and practices to create a more just society. To foster these connections between communication studies and the real world, I approach the classroom space as a community of learners, where students work together to explore how power operates through communication and test communicative strategies for social justice.

I aim to turn the classroom into a collaborative community space, where students are encouraged to tap into prior knowledge and share diverse perspectives. This community-building work starts with the first day of class. Regardless of whether I am teaching a small seminar or a large lecture, I begin every course by asking students to work together to coauthor a set of guidelines for in-class discussions. These collectively established guidelines help students hold themselves and one another accountable for maintaining productive discussions, but more importantly, the process of creating them gives each student a stake in the course's development. Like these discussion guidelines, I also ask my students to collectively establish the course's key definitions and motivating questions. In my seminar on Media, Activism, and Social Movements, we spend much of the first session defining these three terms as a class, based on students' prior knowledge. Then, drawing on our definitions, we develop a list of questions about media, activism, and social movements that we revisit throughout the course. Taken together, these definitions and questions become key reference points for the course, creating a classroom where students' perspectives matter just as much as our assigned readings.

My classroom community offers a productive space for developing critical thinking skills. In both large lectures and small seminars, my lesson plans follow the scaffolded teaching approach of "I do, we do, you do," facilitating a gradual shift from teacher-directed instruction toward student-centered learning. When I teach a major theory or concept, I help students to put it into practice through hands-on, in-class activities. After introducing Stuart Hall's work in my course on Communication and Popular Culture, for example, I ask students to page through magazines and identify the ideological work that representations of difference perform in advertisements. Students take this analytical work a step further in their independent, semester-long Pop Culture Portfolio assignments, in which they select and examine a single pop

culture artifact from the vantage points of several different theoretical frameworks. In one especially memorable portfolio submission, a student paired John Fiske's work on the cultural economy with feminist theory to consider how Meghan Trainor's pop hits can be simultaneously empowering and disempowering for women and girls, all the while wrestling with her own love of Trainor's music. Group activities and assignments like these provide students with the opportunity to explore firsthand how the media we consume on a daily basis operate as sites of power. Student-centered learning is also a key component of my approach to teaching research methods. I introduce students in my Media, Activism, and Social Movements seminar to qualitative methods by asking them to interview one another about personal experiences with street protests and to analyze news media coverage of social movements. Working independently, they put these methodological skills to work and develop a Movement Media Profile, focusing on the media practices of a particular movement, protest, or organization. In each case, I encourage students to test and stretch communication theories and methods and identify their possibilities and limitations, always with the goal of developing a toolbox for critical analysis.

My classroom community is also a laboratory, where students work together to develop and evaluate communication-based interventions for social change. This is a key pillar of my seminar, Making Media, Creating Change: Examining U.S. Feminist Media Activism. Through a semester-long project, students work with community partners to design and launch a digital feminist media campaign that draws on course concepts and tools. In one of our sessions, students in my Media, Activism, and Social Movements seminar study the tactics of the 1960s underground press through online archives and later try their hands at print media activism, coauthoring a how-to zine for activists seeking to improve their communication strategies. Once assembled, we reflect on the zine-making process and think about the strengths and weaknesses of print media as a form of activism. In another class session, we role-play a debate about the effectiveness of online activism using Twitter data and online news media coverage as evidence. Afterwards, students create their own issue-based digital campaigns for social change. In course evaluations, students often report that these types of hands-on activities inspired them to pursue activism outside the classroom for the first time. As a teacher, I aim to push students beyond analysis and toward action, drawing on lessons from the past and research from the field.

Communication, as both a field of study and a set of practices and platforms, is constantly changing and with it, the everyday lives of our students. As the discipline grows and technologies emerge, I work to cultivate a classroom community where students can develop the skills necessary to grapple with and, more importantly, respond to new questions and challenges. Ultimately, my goal is to activate students as civically engaged communicators and media-makers that put the field's theoretical toolbox into practice in their everyday lives and professional careers.