

E. Bianco Teaching Philosophy Statement

I end the first day of every course with the same phrase: “Trust me, you *can* do this.” It may seem trite, but it encompasses the crux of my teaching philosophy: empowerment. As a former undergraduate at an R1 institution, I understand how the university environment can generate a sense of alienation and the dreaded imposter syndrome. I now see it as my responsibility to empower all students to take charge of their own learning without fear of inferiority. To facilitate this, my teaching philosophy revolves around three pillars: 1) creating culturally relevant content, 2) demystifying the academic setting, and 3) rewarding student labor.

Student empowerment begins with developing courses that resonate with students’ cultural knowledge. To this end, I apply critical embodiment pedagogy, which intentionally incorporates students’ values, personal narratives, and identity into the classroom. To achieve this, many of my writing prompts and class discussions pose the following question: “Why do you care about what we learned today?” Such a question reminds students that they should derive their *own* meaning from the course, no matter whether we are debating the Westernization of 19th-century Chinese families or the post-colonial theories of Franz Fanon. I am constantly inspired by their poignant stories of how they see themselves in history, either as an English language learner discussing their experience with immigration authorities or as a barista trying to organize a union. I see myself in a symbiotic relationship with my students: I provide them with the historical context and methodologies to critically analyze their lived experiences, and they show me how this history affects their day-to-day life. When they recognize how they are equally valued as embodiments of living history, they enthusiastically ask questions, fill out free-write responses to the brim, and carry on these discussions during office hours.

I also empower students by demystifying the “hidden curriculum” of academia, as I ask them to contemplate their past encounters with educational institutions. For example, before writing or exam preparation, instead of approaching my students with a punitive “you should know how to do this,” I ask them, “What did someone *not teach you* that professors expect you to know?” This reassures students that these gaps in knowledge are not the result of personal failings but of the frequently arcane nature of academia. As a bonus, this question also generates a targeted list of areas to address in each class (organizing paragraphs, how to analyze primary sources, drafting a thesis statement). Once students open up about their struggles, we can harness the classroom community to collectively design pertinent writing instruction and skills workshops. Here, I can redress any beliefs students have about what qualifies as “good” historical scholarship and academic success and reaffirm that they *do* possess the intellectual capability to succeed in college.

Lastly, students become empowered when an instructor rewards their intellectual efforts. To practically implement this, I design my courses with a labor-based grading model, as inspired by “process orientation”—not “product orientation”—pedagogy. Instead of determining a student’s grade based on one or two cumulative assessments, I guarantee that they will be predominantly evaluated by their participation in daily multi-modal classroom activities, the completion of scaffolding assignments, and self-reflections. My syllabi rely on genre-specific, pragmatic assignments, such as weekly free-writing activities and structured reading notes, so they can practice effective skimming, note-taking, and time management. These low-risk assessments grant the student the freedom to experiment with their own writing voice and learning style without fear of penalization. I have found that labor-based grading also drastically reduced AI usage: after adopting a labor-based model where they prepare for writing projects

step-by-step all quarter, it went from almost every other paper using some form of AI system to only three or four papers in a sixty-person class.

Historians continually strive to reach contemporary audiences across the divisions of gender, race, class, society, geography, and time. I attempt the same in my classroom, where I try to empower *all* students to take the reins of their own learning style and experience.