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I. Introduction

As a graduate student from 201x-201x, I was a Teaching Assistant (TA) or Graduate Part-Time Instructor (GPTI) every term that I was on campus at CU-Boulder. Since I completed my PhD in May 201x I have held a 25% Instructor appointment with the Division of Continuing Education, where I teach an online Introduction to Human Geography course. In total, I have been the instructor of record nine times, leading two upper-division geography courses in X and two lower-division geography courses in X. Students in the X class later nominated me for a Graduate Teaching Excellence award for my work as both a TA and an Instructor on the course. My teaching experience also spans a variety of course levels, class sizes, term durations, and course formats (lectures, discussion sections, upper-level seminars, and online course design).

This Teaching Portfolio describes my approach to college teaching as it has developed across this time period, and in response to many of the workshops that I attended through the Graduate Teacher Program and Center for Teaching & Learning. I have incorporated many of the pedagogical tools from the college teaching workshops into my own teaching practice, and I continue to search for evidence-based approaches to improve my course design, lectures, assessment tools and student feedback.

In the following pages, I describe my approach to teaching and assessment, inclusivity and diversity, and present an extended analysis of my teaching assessments (through FCQs and my own mid-term course survey). In the Appendices I share numerous documents that provide a further sense for what it is like to be in one of my classes, including syllabi for three courses that I have taught as well as discussion prompts, samples of feedback I provide to students, and letters from those who have observed my teaching.

II. Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

As a scholar, teacher, and geographer, I aim to draw attention to the interconnections of people and places across time and space. In the classroom, this focus translates into lesson plans that challenge student's commonsense notions of how the world works. I curate a critical perspective by asking my students to grapple with uncomfortable contradictions, moral ambiguities and ethical grey areas, and to approach every text and source of information with an open but questioning mind. These ways of seeing the world encourage creativity and curiosity, and cultivate reflection about one's own role within issues of local and global significance.

Critical thinking

I believe that the value of undergraduate education lies in the preparation of a student for a lifetime of learning, problem solving and engaged citizenship. Yet, college educators also have a responsibility to provide students with skills that are useful outside of academic settings. Critical thinking and strong writing skills meet both of these objectives: they encourage scholarly and philosophical engagement, and they are essential job market skills. Studies show that students majoring in STEM fields earn higher starting salaries after graduation, but those with interdisciplinary social science training catch up to and surpass the salaries of their STEM peers in the longer term.1 In other words, critical thinking and writing are both esoteric exercises and immanently practical. I believe that this observation is of particular importance in an era where colleges and universities are striving to meet the needs of a new generation of students, including non-traditional students, first-generation students, underrepresented minorities, and students from low-income households.

I take a broad view of critical thinking, seeing my role as helping students build practical, baseline skills and knowledge. Assignments help students develop their written, visual and oral communication skills; situate new ideas within relevant historical context; learn to read a variety of texts and sources; translate numerical literacy into effective argumentation and communication through quantitative reasoning; and build experience communicating through technologies that combine text with visual sources.

Finally, I strongly believe that the people doing the most work in a course are also the ones doing the most learning. In lecture-based courses, the Instructor is doing most of the work. I prioritize finding ways for students to "discover" lessons and key points from texts, to become co-creators of course content and to take an active rather than a passive role in their own learning.

Metacognition

Metacognition is an awareness of how one thinks and learns. While most instructors intentionally build their course syllabus around a set of learning objectives and a progression from basic to more complex concepts, that intention often goes hidden or unseen by students. When students understand what they are doing and why, they develop specific learning

1 Deming, David J, and Kadeem L Noray. 2018. “STEM Careers and the Changing Skill Requirements of Work.” Working Paper 25065. National Bureau of Economic Research. https://doi.org/10.3386/w25065

strategies that they can take into new situations. 2 Metacognition requires that students themselves become aware of the kinds of learning tools they use and how those tools relate to different types of tasks or assignments.3 Cultivating students' sense of their own thinking and learning styles helps them see the bigger picture of a course, even when mired in the details of a specific assignment; it helps students decipher the purpose of course components and what is being asked of them (this is also a strategy towards inclusiveness, as I discuss below); and it encourages students to see a course, an exam, a research paper, or a discussion prompt as a particular kind of teaching and learning tool. In doing so, students better understand instructor expectations and they can dedicate the appropriate levels of time and effort into the task.

In the classroom, I incorporate metacognitive practices across many elements of my teaching. For introductory courses, I introduce Blooms levels of learning during exam review alongside sample exam questions and we talk about the expectations for questions with "analyze" or "compare" in the instructions. In an anonymous mid-term course survey, I ask students to describe what is working and not working in the class (reflection about the instructor and course design) as well as things students themselves are doing well and that they could do better in the second part of the term. The responses to the second question are surprisingly honest. The mid-term survey is a unique opportunity for students to pause mid-course and think about their strategies moving forward. For example, one student mentioned how dense and difficult it was to read the assigned textbook, but then concluded, "Spending 4+ hours straight on Sunday reading and rereading material I find dull is not getting the job done. I may need smaller reading blocks to be more effective."

Pedagogical Tools and Strategies

I ask students to do a lot of writing in my courses. Writing and effective communication are not just critical life skills, they are pedagogical methods that help students synthesize and process complex course material. In a seminar-style class that met once a week, I assigned 15-min. warm-up writing tasks at the beginning of each meeting. The exercise was a useful tool for getting students to think on their own with the assigned texts before discussing the texts as a group. I also incorporate frequent writing and reflection tasks into intro-level courses and discussion sections.

I design major writing assignments in a way that leads students along a research and writing path in manageable increments. In a global public health course I set up a peer-review system that required students to evaluate a classmate's text according to the grading rubric. The assignment benefits both the reviewer and the writer, as it draws the reviewer's attention to how their own work will later be evaluated, and it prompts the student reviewer to offer practical suggestions that help them see their own writing differently.

Recognizing that many students do not have the tools and language with which to write about a foreign culture, I developed a mini-lecture on "How to write about places and cultures that are not your own." Together, the class evaluates examples of student writing that I have

2 Bransford, John D., Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking. 2000. How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition. Wahington, DC: National Academy Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/9853.
3 Chick, Nancy. n.d. “Metacognition.” Vanderbilt University | Center for Teaching | Teaching Guides (blog). Accessed January 12, 2017. https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/metacognition/.

collected from past courses and assignments, identifying passages that use essentializing language and assumptions, discussing what is wrong and how the issues might be corrected. In my upper-level seminar, Geography of X, I introduced map quizzes testing knowledge of the places discussed in the week's readings. The exercise was basic, but students remarked that it helped them develop a stronger geographic sensibility. It was also particularly useful for visual learners who need to root abstract ideas onto tangible places. Finally, the map quizzes encouraged students to read assigned texts alongside other texts and sources, and to take responsibility for filling in gaps in their own knowledge.

I also strive to create opportunities where students can be engaged in topics of local and personal relevance, complementing book-based forms of knowing with ways of knowing that are based in personal experience. While I have not yet had the flexibility to introduce extended engaged learning components into my courses, I do try to bring the world-out-there into my classroom. I do so by incorporating films and news items into my courses. I also invite guest lecturers from local organizations. In my X course I have hosted speakers from the Boulder County AIDS Project and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as a nurse working in the field of international humanitarian health. In the future, I plan to incorporate a short IRW exercise – "In the Real World"—in which students will identify a news article about the topic we are discussing and briefly share it with the class.

Another way that I design assignments relevant to the real world is by drawing on my own professional and research experiences. For example, in my X course I ask students to write project proposals addressing a development issue in a country of the global south. The next time I teach this course, I will hold a class discussion about the challenges students faced in trying to avoid the "traps" and critiques of different development paradigms that we learned about during the term. The exercise bridges the uncomfortable divide between philosophical critique, which is cultivated in course readings, and the implicit moral and social imperative to do something that motivates students to take the course in the first place.

Finally, I assign projects with strong visual and storytelling components. In my Introduction to X course, I developed a final research project using ESRI Online's Story Maps application. Students select a research topic that illustrates the interconnections of places in the world and that draws on concepts from one of the course units, carry out a guided research project on the topic, and then develop an interactive online visualization that combines their research and writing with images, videos and maps. The project encourages experimentation and trouble-shooting with a new technology, it exposes students to a powerful way of expressing ideas using visual and textual sources, and it maintains a commitment to high standards of research, writing and citation.

III. Assessment and Evaluation of Teaching and Student Learning

Assignments in my classes help students develop their written, visual and oral communication skills; situate new ideas within relevant historical context; learn to read a variety of texts and sources; translate numerical literacy into effective argumentation and communication; and build experience communicating through technologies that combine research and writing with visualization and mapping.

Formative assessment

I frequently use formative assessment techniques in my classroom to monitor student progress and to gather quick feedback on whether students are learning. This allows me to make adjustments on the fly, as well as in future sessions. As a low-stakes assessment tool, formative assessments also allow my students to grapple and experiment with new ideas without the pressure of a grade. Therefore, formative assessments also play an important role in the inclusive classroom. I use a combination of no-credit and low-credit assessment tools, including:

- I frequently ask students to do short writing tasks in class (with pen and paper) that I collect and review. Sometimes I use this exercise before a group activity, and I use the subsequent time when students are working in groups without me to review the slips and to get a sense for the level of understanding and engagement on a certain topic. When the class comes back together after group work, I will summarize what I read and draw attention to any areas that need further clarification or explanation.
- In my online courses, the grading for discussion prompts (worth 30% of the total course
grade) is done with an eye towards effort and engagement rather than getting all the answers right. I seek to create an environment where students are encouraged to propose new ideas and share their thoughts on the material without being penalized. Discussions in my online course are graded, and the 12 discussions account for a significant portion of the course grade, but as long as students meet the minimum expectations they will receive nearly full points. This allows them room to make mistakes without being heavily penalized. After grading all the submissions, I post a short video or paragraph clarifying common issues or misunderstandings.
- During in-class discussions, I frequently begin the discussion by asking students to do a writing exercise on a 4x6 card that I collect and review after class. Students are prompted to describe the main arguments or points of the readings we are discussing for the day. The cards make it easy to see who has done the reading and to assign discussion grades, which are mostly based on participation, but the cards also allow me to judge a student's own transformation during a discussion, since a student may not understand something at first but may demonstrate comprehension as they listen to others and processes the reading. Since the reading's finer points are typically the majority of the focus for discussions, I don't have an opportunity to know whether everyone understood the basics without this tool. It allows me to see if students are "getting it" on their own before the discussion begins.
- When I assign larger research and writing projects, I break down the task into incrementally larger and "higher stakes" assignments with

greater points attached.

Students submit their writing topics and list a few sources, and I “approve” the topic selection. This helps me identify trouble early on and get students on the right path long before the final assignment is due.

Summative Assessment

I use a combination of response papers, exams, and final research and writing projects to assess and score students. In introductory courses, my in-class exams incorporate both multiple choice (for ease of grading in large courses) and short essay prompts. In upper-level courses or online environments, my exams are often “take-home” style, which encourages a deeper engagement with readings and is better suited to testing higher levels of learning, such as application of a concept to a new situation, or synthesis of several texts. I always provide comprehensive grading rubrics for assignments and exams, and I make them available at the start of the course.

Teaching Assessments

In Fall 201x I designed an anonymous mid-term course survey tool for my Introduction to X course. Students receive a small grade incentive if they complete the survey, which they see as an opportunity for “extra credit” (which I do not actually offer). I use the survey for a number of different purposes depending on the course and how long I have been teaching it. When I first began teaching Intro to X, the survey allowed me to judge general student satisfaction with the course format, and I made a number of important adjustments based on student feedback in that first term including greater guidance on what was expected on the exams. I have included the same block of questions in the mid- term survey every term since Fall 201x, which allows me to look at trends over time (these are described in some detail in the following section). As I change the course material and introduce different tools and resources, I also use the survey to gather feedback on these “experimental” parts of the course.

Finally, as part of the Graduate Teaching Program, I have undergone several in-person assessments and observations of my own in-person teaching. These include observation of me leading a discussion as a Teaching Assistant by Dr. X, a faculty member in my home department (see the Appendix for her letter), as well as two Video-Taped Consultations with GTP staff members.

IV. SUMMARY OF TEACHING EVALUATIONS

The following pages contain student evaluations of my teaching through Fall 201x, collected from several different assessment tools:

- Section I summarizes data from CU-Boulder's standardized, end-of-term Faculty Course Questionnaire (FCQ) form. My ratings are largely in line with faculty ratings in other Geography courses at CU. I have consistently received high ratings in the categories of respect for students and availability. In three of the last four courses in which I was an instructor (not a teaching assistant), my overall instructor rating has surpassed the departmental average.

- Section II contains results from an anonymous midterm survey that I began conducting in Fall 201x. These survey results paint a different picture than CU's end-of-term FCQs for a number of reasons. The average response rate on my mid-term survey is more than 95% because I offer a small grade incentive (dropping the lowest quiz and discussion grades). The average response rate on CU's FCQ for courses in which I was the Instructor is 66%, and for my online courses the FCQ response rate is 42%. Since my most recent teaching has been in the online environment, the data in Section II is a better representation of my most recent teaching performances and my growth as an instructor. Overwhelmingly, students report on this survey that I provide fair and useful feedback on assignments, grade and evaluate fairly, and that my lecture style furthers their individual learning.

I also provide the open-ended responses on this survey from all students in one term (Fall 201x). They are representative of the kind of responses I have typically received on the mid-term survey's open-ended question block. The responses are largely positive, but I provide all student responses to be transparent

SECTION II: Anonymous mid-term course feedback survey

In Fall 201x I developed an online course, Introduction to X for the Division of Continuing Education at CU. The course has run for four consecutive terms (Fall 201x, Spring 201x, Summer 201x, Fall 201x), and each term I have conducted an anonymous mid-term survey. The evaluation has high response rates (>95%) because I offer a small grade incentive (dropping the lowest of 12 quiz and 12 discussion scores).

Overwhelmingly, students “slightly agree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree” that I provide fair and useful feedback, that learning evaluation tools such as the midterm exam and reading quizzes are fair and accurate reflections of comprehension and effort levels, and that my lectures further their understanding of course material. The results are summarized in the chart below.

The survey serves two purposes: I use the information to make adjustments to the second half of the course and to future iterations of the course, and a block of questions is intended to encourage student metacognition (self-awareness) of study habits and learning styles. Thus, for example, I ask students to evaluate the effectiveness of my lectures and what I could do to better serve them, but I also ask them to evaluate their own performance and what they could do better in the rest of the course. All student responses to the open-ended questions from Fall 2019 are provided below the chart of closed-ended questions. These are unedited, but they are representative of the responses to open-ended questions that I have received in previous terms.

V. Inclusivity, Equity and Commitment to Diversity

I believe that commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion must be incorporated into all aspects of University life, and not simply included as additional considerations. My efforts towards diversity, equity and inclusion in the classroom can be grouped into three areas of focus:

(1) Setting a framework for community,
(2) Making room for diverse learning styles, and
(3) Creating transparent pathways to success.

I operationalize these principles into my class through small but regular strategies that are incorporated into all parts of the course, from the syllabus to the first day of in-person meetings to assignments, discussions, lecture and evaluation. As such, they work together to create an environment where students know one another, where people from different backgrounds feel secure and are able to learn in their own ways, and in which students themselves take ownership over the learning process.

Setting a framework for community

I begin by cultivating a welcoming atmosphere that emphasizes acceptance and community, and I create scenarios where students get to know me and, more importantly, each other. Students often learn best when they go through a process of transformation and discovery. Typically this process takes place when students are engaging with each other on course content, rather than passively listening to a lecture. Yet transformative learning moments can only take place if students feel safe, included, respected and heard. To do this, I establish ground rules for class activities.4 We discuss the importance of the ground rules together in the first week. They include:

- Be honest and willing to share.
- Listen with curiosity and the willingness to learn.
- Resist the desire to interrupt.
- Think critically not only about others' perspectives, but also about your own.
- Use "I" statements. No one speaks for another or for an entire group of people.
- You can disagree! Differences in perspectives foster learning.
- Be brief.

Many of the texts and videos that I select are intended to challenge mainstream views of the world. For example, I recently designed an activity that asks students to read an article about the origins of the Black Lives Matter movement, and to listen to a podcast from the New York Times' 1619 Project about the role of African Americans in American democracy.5 One of the

4 Adapted from the University of Michigan, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching-CRLT. (2004). Guidelines for discussion of racial conflict and the language of hate, bias, and discrimination, http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/racialguidelines.html

5 Garza, Alicia. (2016). "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement." In Are All the Women Still White?:

Rethinking Race, Expanding Feminisms, edited by Janell Hobson. SUNY Press; Hannah-Jones, Nikole (Host). (2019, August 23). Episode 1: The Fight for a True Democracy [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/23/podcasts/1619-slavery-anniversary.html.

discussion prompts is, “What do you know about slavery, and where does that information come from?” It is important that students are able to use tools and concepts form the course to discuss the material, but I also want them to engage in a deeper reflection. Having such discussions is also a major opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and the process of discovery. For any of this learning to happen, students must feel that they are part of a safe and supportive community.

Making room for diverse learning styles

My teaching is directed not just to the most advanced and outspoken students, but to everyone in the room. I create many low-consequence opportunities for students to ask questions, including through small group work, short turn-and-talk exercises with a neighbor, and think-pair-share exercises. These break up a lecture and allow students to engage with each other in a “flipped classroom” situation. These exercises also allow students to pause and clarify something without needing to admit their confusion to an entire class. Importantly, in think-pair-share exercises I always ensure sufficient time is given over to the “think.” This allows students to find their own voice and ideas before a dominating or more assured student jumps in. In small group exercises I clearly define roles, responsibilities and discussion guidelines. This keeps groups focused on collaborating to complete a task or process, and ensures equal participation.

Transparent pathways to success

Evidence shows that creating structure is important for all students, but particularly for those from different cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and confidence levels, such as many first- generation college students. A strong and effective course structure links class exercises and assignments with learning objectives and transparent evaluation mechanisms. In the last few years I have written learning objectives for every text assigned and every lecture delivered. These learning objectives become the study guide for exams, introducing a transparent pathway to success in my classes that does not require guesswork or decoding.

While most instructors intentionally build their course syllabus around a set of learning objectives and a progression from basic to more complex concepts, that intention often goes hidden or unseen by students. When students understand what they are doing and why, they develop specific learning strategies that they can take into new situations.6 Metacognition is an awareness of how one thinks and learns. It requires that students themselves become aware of the kinds of learning tools they use and how those tools relate to different tasks or assignments.7 Cultivating students’ sense of their own thinking and learning styles helps them see the bigger picture, even when mired in the details; it helps students decipher the purpose of course components and what is being asked of them; and it encourages students to see a course, an exam, a research paper, or a discussion prompt as a particular kind of teaching and learning tool. In doing so, students better understand faculty expectations and they can dedicate the appropriate levels of time and effort into the task. Nurturing metacognitive

6 Bransford, John D., Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking. 2000. How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition. Wahington, DC: National Academy Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/9853.

7 Chick, Nancy. n.d. “Metacognition.” Vanderbilt University | Center for Teaching | Teaching Guides (blog). Accessed January 12, 2017. https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/metacognition/.

practices is another way of creating transparent pathways to success that have particular benefit to non-traditional students.