Teaching Portfolio for Certificate in College Teaching

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Introduction to Components of the Portfolio

Doctoral programs often prioritize developing their students as researchers while expecting students to figure out teaching organically. My mother is an educator, and I came to Boulder with some experience in tutoring and teaching, so I knew that teaching is, in fact, a cultivated skill. From my very first semester, I decided to use my time at CU Boulder to grow not only as a researcher but also as a future professor. Luckily at Boulder we have great resources at our disposal. I attended many GTP workshops, and I participated in the fantastic Diversity on Campus summer workshop. I also received excellent mentorship while teaching alongside Dr. Pete Simonson in the Department of Communication. I was nervous about the Video Teaching Consultations, so I decided to take the plunge and do my first one during my first year. I then saved the second one until I held a Graduate Part-Time Instructor position and had had more experience teaching.

It's been an immensely fulfilling journey. As I prepared to go on the job market and sat down to write my teaching philosophy, it was remarkable to realize that the task came easy because, without even noticing, I had developed one. As I now prepare to graduate from my doctoral program, I have a clear sense of why I teach and what kind of teacher I am. I know my pedagogical strengths and weaknesses at present, and I know how I plan to continue to grow in the classroom. I can develop a balanced, engaging, and robust syllabus, and I have learned how to design lesson plans that meet the needs of a variety of learning styles.

This portfolio demonstrates my hard work and growth over the last four years. In the next section are descriptions of my growth and learning: my teaching philosophy; an account of assessment and evaluation of both student learning and my own teaching; my statement of diversity and equity in the classroom; and my full curriculum vitae. The remainder of the portfolio, the appendixes, are demonstrations and examples of the growth described. At the beginning of the appendices is a roster of all the courses I have taught in some capacity. Two summers ago, I was first given my own course to design and teach: MDST 3711, Media and Popular Culture. I have now taught it five times and slowly tweaked and improved the curriculum. Included in the appendices are the syllabus, several assignments, and rubrics from recent iterations of the course. I have also included three course proposals I have developed, a selection of student feedback, and a faculty evaluation of my teaching.

Evidence of Teaching Development

Philosophy of Teaching & Learning

Growing up in South Africa, my first encounter with education was through the Cape Town public school system, largely modeled on a British education. I later completed high school and my higher education in the United States, which exposed me to quite different cultural pedagogical approaches. Coupled with my experiences at both liberal arts colleges and R1 institutions, I have learned that education takes on many different forms and that, like me, my students arrive in my classroom with diverse educational backgrounds, expectations, and learning styles. It is an instructor's responsibility to recognize each student's unique needs and then create a shared platform from which my students can collaboratively learn.

This multifaceted nature of the classroom lends itself to my primary goal as an educator in the field of media, communication, and culture: to teach my students how to listen well. This might seem counter-intuitive; typically, as instructors in this field, we are asked to teach communication skills, public speaking, argumentation, rhetoric, media production, etc. The focus is on teaching our students to develop and add their voice to society, and indeed, those are important skills for our students to acquire. However, from my experience teaching, I've noticed that my students have often been trained to express their opinions at the expense of developing the discipline of active listening—a fundamental component of productive communication and democracy. Listening is also about curiosity and openness, two other attitudes I hope to instill in the classroom.

One way in which I try to teach listening is through how I define participation. In the U.S. classroom, participation is often defined by how much a student speaks. I ask my students to think beyond this definition during the first week and to reflect on what forms participation can take in the classroom. We collectively establish our own definition that includes contributions such as summarizing discussion on the board, asking peers to clarify their statements, and tactfully interrupting a discussion to acknowledge the emotional temperature of the room or the time. I also work with individuals to determine what participation might look like for them. For example, one of my students knew she spoke too much in class, and initially, I noticed her response was to try and silence herself. Rather than encouraging this young woman to self-censor, I suggested she try turn her contributions into questions. Throughout the semester, I helped her learn how to craft inquisitive questions for her peers that generated more discussion and encouraged greater collective participation.

In conjunction with listening, I also challenge my students to think about what they can do in response to the societal problems they have been taught to critically identify: "pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will" as Gramsci aptly put it. Productive responses begin with the self, so I am starting to introduce assignments where my students engage in self-reflection and then develop a personal philosophy of how they will conscientiously conduct their lives in relation to media and society. I decided to take this approach after reading countless student research papers critiquing the impact of social media on their generation's mental health and body image. Most of the papers aptly laid out the problem, but few gave tangible solutions. When I prompt my students with questions of "now what?", they often express feelings of helplessness.

As a result, with my upper level students, I am shifting my primary class objectives from developing skills of diagnosis to emphasizing the dynamism of culture and the power that they wield as individuals and communities to bring about change. Theoretically, for example, I use Dick Hebdige's arguments about subcultures and the role of style in challenging hegemony to analyze contemporary stylistic trends. Using local movements such as #MeToo and global ones such as #RhodesMustFall in South Africa, I have them reflect on the power of collective action enacted by young people like themselves in this contemporary moment.

It can be difficult to ascertain whether one's pedagogical approaches are "effective", but recently I have been able to teach students in my upper level course Media and Popular Culture who I once taught in introductory courses as freshmen. Not only have I seen their evolution as students, but I've had several emails or conversations where students have directly acknowledged and thanked me for the role I played in their growth. I also take their constructive criticism to heart, and I am constantly reforming my course material in response. In order to teach active listening, I must first model it.

As a Third Culture Kid, caught between U.S. and South African cultures, I have learned to constantly adapt to the environment in which I find myself. This experience inspires my research on the role of media within and between various cultural identities, and it has given me the tools and discipline to be better attuned to my students from assorted backgrounds. Furthermore, it has also motivated me to desire the same attunement for my students. If my students can leave the classroom with greater respect for each other and with concrete tools of communication and mediation by which to form connections, not merely individual success and significance, then I have succeeded as their instructor.

Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning and Your Own Teaching

Assessment for No Grade

Prior to every class session, I assign a very brief quiz (for grade) on the assigned texts. I design my quizzes to test base-level comprehension of the material rather than to simply gauge whether or not my students read/watched/listened to the texts through arbitrary questions. As a result, I head into every class period with a good sense of what concepts I need to focus on unpacking.

I have learned through experience that asking students, "Does that make sense?", usually generates silent nods even when the students still have questions. Students are often afraid of "failing" in front of their peers, and classroom silence reinforces the misconception that everyone else in the class understands while they do not.

In response to this dynamic, I do a few things:

- On the first day of class, I tell my students that much of the material they will encounter in media and communication courses will require them to wrestle with the grey. I acknowledge that, in many of their previous academic experiences, they have been trained to find and deliver the right answer. There is a clear realm of black and white, wrong and right. However, the study of media and culture requires engaging with a lot of uncertainty. There are definitely wrong answers, but many times there isn't just one right answer and sometimes the answer is not clear at all. I invite students to embrace the fuzziness, plunge into the unknown, and venture down paths of possibility to see what they find.
- I reinforce this in the classroom through how I navigate discussion. Whenever a student offers a suggestion, a possible answer, or an opinion, I try to avoid responding with a simple "right" or "wrong". I begin by repeating back to the student what I heard, in my own words, to make sure I understand. Once the student affirms that we are on the same page, I ask the student to explain how they came to that idea and why they are suggesting it. Once we have collectively connected the dots of the student's thought process, then I connect the suggestion to the topic of discussion. Depending on the situation, sometimes I invite the rest of the class to respond with what they think, and it leads to a larger productive discussion that I simply moderate. Other times, I will tease out the suggestion and map it back onto the taught material, explaining why the two are compatible or not. While doing so, I always affirm the student's thought process even when I demonstrate why they are wrong. My goal is to model formative conversations in the classroom, where being wrong (or right!) is an opportunity for growth and community development. Underlying this goal is a commitment to listening—listening to my students and teaching them to listen to one another.
- I also use the quizzes to verbally acknowledge to my students the common areas of confusion. I highlight those areas in my lectures, and I use multimedia resources and activities to demonstrate the concepts. Following lectures and activities, I invite

students who feel ready to try and rearticulate the concepts to their peers because often they have quite helpful ideas of how to explain the concepts.

Throughout the course of these discussions, I am able to listen carefully and assess whether the students are understanding. If they are struggling with a concept, I will find ways to weave that concept into the next few classes so they can keep reencountering the idea in new contexts and can practice using it in a variety of ways. I will also go home and try come up with activities to do in class that might help demonstrate the idea, or look up some more representative case studies to discuss.

Evaluation Practices

In-class work:

This work counts towards their participation grade. In the syllabus, I write:

> For this course, you will be graded on overall participation rather than attendance. By participation, I do not simply mean speaking in class. Participation can take many forms, and in particular, it is characterized by attentive listening. How are you listening to your peers? Are you asking questions? Raising points for clarification? Good participation can entail offering alternative perspectives and providing constructive criticism, but it can also entail reflection on how the class discussion is going, providing helpful summaries of what has been discussed and suggesting new paths forward. Helpful participation could be providing affirmation to a peer, encouraging a classmate to share their opinion, or sharing your feelings about a topic, in addition to your thoughts. Good participation is about knowing when to share, and when to step back and let others speak.
>
> *(I add this for my online courses.)*
> For an online course, this takes a slightly different format as all engagement will take place through the written medium. However, the principles still apply. Are you simply posting your opinion and then signing off? Are you clearly reading your classmates' posts and responding to them with reflections, affirmations, questions, more supporting evidence, and/or alternative perspectives? Are you taking the time to engage quieter classmates and make them feel welcome? If you are one of those quieter classmates, what steps are you taking to participate more intentionally?
>
> I grade participation on a 3-point scale:
> - 0 – Absent
> - 1 – Present but did not participate.
> - 2 – Made some contributions to the discussion.
>   (Or contributed frequently at the exclusion of others.)
> - 3 – Strong, consistent contributions to discussion.
>
> Participation grades will be posted at the end of the semester, but you can request a

participation grade check-in at any time.

Essays/Final Projects:
I use rubrics for all of my qualitative assignments, such as essays and the final project. The rubrics are available to students prior to submission, and they provide a very clear breakdown of my expectations. The rubrics help me be consistent and fairer with my students, while also speeding up my grading, as they keep me focused on the purpose of the assignment.
At the same time, rubrics allow me flexibility when I grade. Students will often take quite distinct and creative approaches to an assignment, and the rubrics help me to grade based on the core expectations rather than by a comparison of projects. Some rubrics have been included in the appendix.

Exams:
For my current class, I assign one summative exam and then one final project. I do this because the first half of the class is more theoretically driven, while the second half of the class is about application. By the midterm, I want to see that my students understand the core principles of the class before heading into application of those theories. Because of this goal and based on the course material, my exams are primarily short answer rather than multiple choice. The point of this class is not to memorize lists of terms but rather to understand the relationship between media, culture, and the popular. I expect my students to demonstrate an understanding of the terms rather than just regurgitate basic definitions and words. I also think this allows my students more capacity to succeed because I'm open to a range of answers in their responses. I will also give partial credit if I can see the student has partial comprehension.

When I write my exams, I create an accompanying answer key that prompts the key terms/ideas that need to show up in their answers. I embed this answer key into the exams on Canvas so they show up in SpeedGrader and so the students see them on completion of the exam. For example (and this is highly distilled), I lay out a case study involving Kaepernick refusing to stand for the anthem and ask the students to define the term "hegemony" and explain what role hegemony has in this case study. The answer key notes that: (1) student must define hegemony; key things to reference: common sense; power through consent, not just coercion; and (2) student must give specific examples from the case study, e.g. "standing for the national anthem is hegemonic"; "playing the national anthem at sports games is hegemonic"; "sports team managers expecting performances of patriotism as part of job is hegemonic", etc.

Other Assignments:
For several other assignments, I grade them simply Completion/Non-Completion. I do this for assignments that I want students to relax and enjoy, i.e. the more experiential assignments. As long as they hit the basic requirements, they receive a completion grade, so they can choose how much effort they wish to invest. If they do not meet basic requirements, I mark it as non-completion and allow the student to resubmit if they wish.

Assessments of My Teaching

I have been assessed a number of times during my time at CU Boulder. On several occasions I have been evaluated after giving lectures to larger classes. Through these evaluations, I have learned I tend to be too quiet in a lecture setting, and that I tend to try and do too much. I have been working on trying to simplify lecture material and to project my voice better.

I did my first video consultation with X for a CMCI 1010 recitation during my first semester teaching at CU Boulder, and the focus of the consultation was addressing how I acknowledge the range of student learning styles and needs in the room. That was very eye-opening for me because up until that point I had taught according to my own learning preferences. I love discussion, and I find discussion to be most helpful in my own learning experience, but the video consultation helped me recognize that that was not how everyone in my classroom learned best. Since then, I have been so much more attentive to the range of needs and pedagogical preferences in the class.

My second video consultation was for my MDST 3711 Media & Popular Culture course. X and I decided to do an interaction analysis to get a sense for how my use of discussion was addressing the diversity of learners in the classroom. The analysis revealed that in the large group I did an excellent job of managing discussion and engaging a wide range of my different students. However, it also revealed that I could be doing a better job in my interactions with students, while they are working in breakout groups and pairs. Since that consultation, this has been something I have been intentionally working on, and I have improved immensely.

I have also had several other assessments in both recitations and my own classroom. I consistently receive strong feedback about my capacity to facilitate discussions and help students comprehend material. In the past, I have received constructive feedback about doing a better job with time management and with managing students who talk too much in class. Since receiving this feedback, I have made a conscious effort to improve in these areas and recent feedback indicates that I have indeed improved significantly.

Diversity Statement

My life has been a complicated mix of privilege and displacement. My father and his family were forced out of Zimbabwe after Robert Mugabe became president; meanwhile my mother and her family at that time were trying to find ways to quietly subvert the unjust segregation of apartheid just across the border in South Africa. On my father's side, their exile to South Africa meant that his parents struggled financially the rest of their lives. In contrast, my mother's side, while conscientiously opposing apartheid, nevertheless benefitted socioeconomically from colonialism and apartheid due to the whiteness of their skin.

I was born into this complexity in the year that Nelson Mandela was released from Robben Island. Four years later, we elected him into office as the first democratic president of the new Republic of South Africa, and the new generation of youth, born just a few years after me, were dubbed the Born Free Generation. When I was thirteen, my parents decided to move us to Tennessee, motivated by rising crime, governmental corruption, and my father's memories of what had happened to his parents. I have since gained U.S. citizenship, maintained alongside my South African and U.K. citizenships; I finished multiple levels of higher education, and I'm now about to graduate with a Ph.D. In other terms, economically, the relocation benefitted me greatly. Nevertheless, immigration was difficult socially and mentally. Over a decade later, I still struggle to feel like I belong here in the U.S., and simultaneously, I'm no longer fully comfortable back in South Africa.

My current research is very much a response to my personal history that prompted me to address the intersectionality of identities, along with the precarious ways in which we try to make meaning of our lives through national imaginaries. Decolonial theory has been a space where I reckon with my colonial heritage, and it has equipped me with tools to step up alongside the post-apartheid generation to actively envision a better future for the region. Furthermore, posthumanism gave me a lens to recognize the ways in which colonialism and other human inclinations towards 'progress' have always been achieved at the expense of the non-human—a definition that shifts according to the expediency of the moment.

I teach postcolonialism to my students as a framework for thinking about how dominant culture tends to colonize all identities that might undermine hegemonic values. As with intersectionality, post-colonial theory necessitates an acknowledgement of the ways in which multiple aspects of identity, such as race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, interact at both the individual and societal level, shaping the nature of the colonization and any resistance movements. As a result, during my Media & Popular Culture course, rather than teaching separate modules on each of the aforementioned identity categories and how they experience and interact with popular culture, I place these various factors into conversation with one another and with other elements of the curriculum. For example, in the module about the political economy of popular culture, I assign bell hook's essay "Eating the Other", which addresses the commodification and exploitation of the exotic Other, alongside Karl Marx's economic theory and a piece about globalization and K-Pop.

My decolonial commitments have also motivated me to scrutinize my syllabi and consider the ways in which I continue to privilege white, male voices in my curriculum. This is a work in progress, but I have been gradually trying to introduce non-hegemonic perspectives to

my students. This includes both case studies from outside the U.S. and Western Europe, but also theoretical work from historically silenced voices, especially those from the Global South whose research already deeply informs my scholarship.

I also want to acknowledge the role that gender has played in my work. I am immensely grateful to have grown up in a family where gender did not play a factor in my career goals and where computers and technology were not seen as “masculine” endeavors. My mother was a computer programmer during the early days of the computer’s introduction to society, and my parents ran some of the first computer courses in South Africa. My mother made me learn code at a young age even though I hated it, which has now proved useful as I have rediscovered the value of Python for my research. After I left home, it was an initial shock to recognize how unusual my childhood was and to see the critical levels of societal gender disparity, even in the 21st century. Although my research doesn’t directly address issues of gender, I stress these concerns in my classroom. Both through my curriculum and through techniques for managing class participation, I try to create an environment where my female students, who perhaps didn’t grow up in an empowering household, can begin to develop their own voice and strengthen their confidence.

I recognize the role of privilege in my life, but many of my life experiences have simultaneously enabled me to understand the dark side of that privilege. For instance, the expense and frustration of my family’s immigration experience is a healthy reminder that as difficult as it was for us, it is much harder—or impossible—for others. These are lessons that I take into my research, my teaching, and my academic involvement, as I hope to cultivate conscientious students.