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STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

When I first began teaching, I was working in the studio as a teacher of voice. My job was to assist students with accessing their potential as speakers and actors: to find places where they held tension in their bodies, hid from their peers emotionally, and limited their own voices in the myriad ways we silence ourselves on a daily basis. Almost every day in the studio I found that my task as the instructor was less one of pedagogy and more one of listening and openness. I discovered that the only real way to help those young actors find clearer, freer access to their voices was to pay very close attention to their processes, to actively listen to them in order to know what they needed. I moved into teaching in classroom settings in 2006, and I have found that the same principle applies to students in the classroom as it does in the studio. My students need me, most of all, to listen to them, to be constantly aware of what they need so that I can help them reach their potential as critical thinkers.

I believe in interactivity in the classroom. I conduct the majority of my classes using a dialogic method, in which I ask the group questions or present them with various theoretical problems and assist them as they work through these problems as a group. I work to create a safe space where students can think together and respond to each others' ideas, solving problems, discussing issues of history, or contemplating theoretical concepts together. It is my experience that students learn best when they struggle with concepts that are slightly more difficult than they think they can handle and then gain a purchase on the material through critical thinking in the classroom. I believe, as Aristotle noted in his *Poetics*, that students find a deep pleasure in learning, and that facilitating the pleasure of discovery and growth is the chief goal of a good teacher. Working hard in the classroom to understand the day's material, as well as one another's points of view, students are more apt to retain difficult concepts and to find ways of practically applying their ideas.

I want my students to leave my courses, most of all, with the ability to think critically and methodologically about the world in which they live. In theatre history courses this translates to an ability to place the theatre they see onstage now in the context of the entire history of the form, making connections with the traditions, anti-traditions, and specific artistic projects of the past. In my senior seminars and dramatic literature courses, I am interested in them reading texts that have impacted the field; more importantly, however, they should leave the course with methods for critically approaching both specific dramatic projects and the field of theatre as a whole. In other words, I want my students to be able to critique and examine representational practices of all kinds – in film, theatre, and across the internet and its various media platforms.

I am also firmly committed to gender parity on my syllabi. It is my belief that a true feminist pedagogy ought to be reflected in the reading material that we assign our students. For me, this means that in each of my courses, the number of assigned texts written by women at least equals the number of assigned texts written by men. This is often quite a difficult task – in courses, for example, such as ancient theatre history, in which a majority of the traditional

primary source material was penned by white men – but it is always possible. I take it as a feminist obligation that my coursework avoids the replication, and thereby the propagation, of the silencing of the voices of women practiced by generations of scholars, publishers, and regional theatres.

I believe that students need to become impeccable with their own words, both in classroom discussion and in their written work. I pay close attention to student writing, making a concerted effort to improving each student's facility with the written word. An attention to language can serve students in any field in which they choose to work after they leave my classroom and the university. In an environment in which fields of study in the humanities are embattled, constantly asked to justify their existence and use-value, I believe that one of the ways we in the humanities can provide an obvious use-value to students in STEM disciplines is by helping those students to communicate better and to articulate their ideas in clearer, more specific language. This is difficult for students across all departments, but in each course that I teach I strive to assign my students something that, at the beginning of the course, they did not believe they could accomplish on their own. Such an assignment, which is sometimes a writing assignment and sometimes a creative project, is always something that the students can actually accomplish with enough attention and investment. I have found that students feel rewarded, proud, and confident when they are able to complete a task that they didn't think they could manage. Assignments of this sort are able to instill students with a confidence that will serve them as they continue in life and help them to make stronger, bolder, more creative decisions that can set them apart from others in their fields.

Most importantly, I am interested in creating spaces in which students can learn. I believe the classroom is a place where I can produce an environment that facilitates the learning and growth of my students while, at the same time, I try to minimize their own need for me as their instructor. My priority is to provide my students with techniques and skills that they can utilize outside of the classroom in their interactions with colleagues, friends, and the phenomena with which they come in contact in their daily lives. I believe that my role as a teacher is to help my students need me less. I want them to be able to depend upon themselves and the skill sets I am able to help them realize. In short, my philosophy as a teacher is to make myself smaller and to make my students larger.