

Teaching Philosophy Statement

As a first-generation high school graduate now completing a PhD program, I owe my success to educators who demonstrated both excellence in teaching and a genuine investment in my future. These instructors recognized the individualized support I needed while nurturing my independence, curiosity, and drive. My teaching philosophy, first and foremost, centers recreating the sense of connection and I felt under the guidance of such mentor figures. Additionally, my practice is informed by my expertise as a scholar of disability and learning. Finally, my position as an interdisciplinary scientist shapes my goals as an instructor. Each of these facets converges on a common theme of *adaptability*. By intentionally designing my classroom to be scalable to individual students' experiences, I pursue equity, accessibility, and finally, a learning environment which fosters cross-discipline scholarship.

At University of Texas at Austin, graduate students are granted the opportunity to take full stewardship of a class as Assistant Instructors (AIs). Thus, my two appointments as an AI for introductory linguistics have given me a direct opportunity to develop my teaching approach. A signature component I introduced to my course is the use of “workshop” sessions to capstone weekly units. In these sessions, I guide students through assignments that supplement lecture materials. For structural units (e.g., syntax, phonology), these assignments consist of practice problems, while other assignments are interactive activities designed to emulate real-world linguistics applications. For example, in our language acquisition workshop, the students conduct a scaled-down version of a pragmatic communication paradigm from a real-world psycholinguistic study. Our language documentation workshop, likewise, consists of an actual documentation session with a native speaker of an endangered language. The range of these assignments provides high-impact, authentic learning experiences that help students build confidence in real-world applications of the course content. Likewise, students have the opportunity to showcase their individual interests in collaboration with their peers.

Each type of assignment I administer comes with its own level of expectations. This practice provides a “stepping-stone” model to mastering concepts while employing a range of evaluation tools. Workshop assignments, for example, are low stakes; they are weighted less in the overall grading schema and graded for completion with feedback. Homework assignments serve as a bridge from practice to assessment. The problems are more challenging, building off foundations from workshop, and students are expected to complete these assignments

independently (but are able to consult me for assistance). Finally, their take-home exams are completely independent. This means that a student has three chances to demonstrate competency in a given learning objective, along scaffolded activities that build upon the complexity and the level of independent problem-solving expected. My aim is to begin execution of concepts with abundant support, then encourage students to demonstrate independent mastery, and, in more advanced cases, independent inquiry. Relatedly, I also hold an open book policy for all assignments, including exams; this allows me to deliver more challenging problems with more rewarding learning outcomes. Moreover, open-book policies increase accessibility, evaluating a student's ability to *apply* concepts rather than recall them in a time-limited environment. Finally, I favor open-book policies because they reflect how we actually perform science: with plenty of resources at our disposal. Such resources are often key to leveling the playing field for scholars from underserved backgrounds.

The content, as well as the structure, of my assignments also reflects my commitment to adaptability and interdisciplinary, student-driven application. Linguistics is situated between the humanities and sciences; the assignments for my course reflect this. Students complete essay reflections on topics such as sociolinguistic variation in addition to practice problems in structural subfields like syntax. Additionally, I include an open-ended final project as a component of the course. I borrowed the execution of this component directly from a course I served as a teaching assistant for ("Language and Identity" by Dr. Rajka Smiljanic) due to its reception. In this project, students may pursue any topic related to the class and deliver it in any appropriate format. Completed projects range from a traditional essay about a phonological pattern to a brochure about stuttering to be left in a pediatrician's office. Students consistently demonstrate enthusiasm about this component. I find that for the students most engaged in the course, they fully take this as an opportunity to dive deep into a topic of interest, meeting with me to discuss the project on multiple occasions. Additionally, in the spirit of acknowledging all languages' value (a core concept of the introductory linguistics course), I allow students to submit their final project in any of their native languages. A few students have taken me up on this, delivering the final version of their projects in Spanish, for example. I feel proud that they feel empowered to do so and, in turn, have created something that can be shared with their own language community.

Finally, the fact that I have served as course head for introductory linguistics on two occasions has also allowed me to identify student-centered course design improvements. Rather than organizing the course based on the textbook table of contents, I used backward design to front-end the skills, behaviors, and desired learning outcomes of the course topics. Due to feedback from students, during my second iteration of the course, I interleaved the structural chapters (phonology, morphology, etc.) with applied units (language variation, documentation, processing). I also intentionally paired these units together, for example, following the phonetics unit with a variation unit, then tying the two weeks with a guest lecture from a socio-phonetics researcher of Caribbean Spanish. This, I feel, has made students feel more engaged throughout the semester and also solidifies concepts from theoretical units with diverse, real-world applications.

Having stated my practical approaches to teaching, I'd like to end my statement by recognizing the crucial role that the community of inquiry plays in all of teaching. Above all, I aim to convey genuine enthusiasm and respect for what my students bring to the table as learners, take care to foster student-to-students and student-to-teacher interaction, and to invite students to share personal insights and experiences alongside their academic goals in the classroom. Over the course of my PhD program, I have come to the realization that though I am a capable researcher, I thrive most while directly interacting with students. Connection is central in everything I pursue, from mentorship with first-generation students to investigating the experience of disabled second language learners. The classroom affords the most direct opportunity for connection, and I feel my effectiveness in this domain from the confidence of my own students in their pursuits within and beyond the classroom. This is why I am specifically seeking out teaching-oriented positions following the completion of my graduate program. I deeply look forward to the most rewarding opportunity to use my knowledge and experience as a researcher to guide students in their own academic journeys.