Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Over my thirty-year career in higher education, my teaching philosophy has continually evolved as I gained experience and developed as a teacher. Early in my career, my approach to teaching was greatly influenced by the ideas of Paolo Freire, who calls for *liberatory* and *transformative* education as essential to democratic societies. In fact, my first peer-reviewed publication as a new Assistant Professor of English was an exploration of these ideas as I began to develop my own teaching philosophy. The idea that education is transformative has remained at the core of my teaching, and over the years I have participated in numerous faculty development opportunities related to teaching and learning. As I tell faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences, no matter how much teaching experience we have, we should still continue to think critically about our teaching and develop as teachers. Life-long learning, after all, is what we encourage our students to do.

After about fifteen years of teaching, I discovered Ken Bain's influential book, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, which reinvigorated my teaching. I began including a description of Bain's concept of "critical learning environment" in my syllabi and discussing the concept with students in the first week of class. I helped students understand the importance of building a community of learners in which both students and teacher contribute to the exchange of ideas and to each other's learning. In this kind of classroom, everyone has obligations to the community. Class activities in such a classroom include:

1. Questions, problems, and ideas to prompt discussion.
2. Guidance to help students understand the significance and contexts of these questions, problems, and ideas.
3. Participatory class discussion that includes higher order intellectual activities, such as comparing, applying, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing (but rarely simply listening and remembering), as we answer questions, solve problems, and understand ideas.
4. The next and remaining questions, problems, and ideas (What conclusions did you draw? What questions remain in your mind? Where do we go next?)

Although I have been an administrator for many years and have not taught as regularly as I did as a full-time faculty member, I continue to think critically about teaching and facilitate faculty development opportunities and conversations related to teaching. This past semester, I challenged faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences to think about our purpose, and I will continue to challenge faculty to think critically about teaching and to write a teaching philosophy. Many faculty have not revised their teaching philosophies since their tenure reviews, some faculty do not have a statement of teaching philosophy, and we have many new faculty whom I want to encourage to develop a living and dynamic teaching philosophy.

As I have thought about our purpose as professors in the Arts and Sciences, I cannot say it better than Alice Dreger in her book, *Galileo's Middle Finger* (2016):

"I have come to understand that the pursuit of evidence is probably the most pressing moral

imperative of our time. All of our work as scholars, activists, and citizens of a democracy depends on it."

Dreger writes:

> If—as the investigative press collapses and no longer can function as an effective check on excess and corruption, and people live and die forever inhabiting self-obsessed corners of the Internet, and the government and the ad-selling Google industrial complex ever increase surveillance on us, and we can't trust people in the government to be our advocates or even to be sensible—if we have any hope of maintaining freedom of thought and freedom of person in the near and distant future, we have to remember what the Founding Fathers knew: That freedom of thought and freedom of person must be erected together. That truth and justice cannot exist one without the other. That when one is threatened, the other is harmed. That justice and thus morality *require* the empirical pursuit.

The "empirical pursuit" should be the one, single purpose that unites every single program at a college and university. If we teach students how to learn, how to seek knowledge, how to use evidence to find the truth, we have fulfilled our mission in higher education.

How do we lead students to this "empirical pursuit" and how do we help students learn to learn?

We make our courses and classrooms sites of active learning. As Cathy Davidson argues in *The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World in Flux*, the current model of higher education was developed in late 19th century to train workers for jobs in an emerging industrial economy—education was based on discipline-specific, specialized training, no longer relevant for a postindustrial post-internet world. This model continues to focus on tests, outcomes, standards, and institutional requirements, while specific skills-defined jobs become increasingly obsolete through outsourcing and automation.

Davidson calls for a new model of education that shifts from fulfilling requirements to learning for success in the world after college, a new model of education that:

> -redefines traditional disciplinary boundaries and departments,
> -promotes cross-disciplinary learning, active learning, and experiential learning,
> -focuses on inquiry, problem-solving, global learning, and integrative learning,
> -requires continuous critical reflection about knowledge and learning,
> -moves away from summative feedback and uses formative feedback, as the demonstrated most effective way to improve learning,
> -invites students to become independent, self-motivated learners, and
> -transforms individuals and society, by having what Davidson calls "palpable impact."

For me, Davidson's work is an extension of Freire's *liberatory pedagogy* and Bain's *critical learning environment*. Davidson provides powerful examples of courses and programs that are transforming into sites of "active learning." This approach to knowledge and learning is familiar to those of us who champion a broad liberal arts education. Our purpose, our mission, in the

liberal arts and sciences has always been to teach students how to learn, how to seek knowledge, and how to use evidence to find the truth. This is where I am now in my teaching journey. Although my teaching opportunities are limited as an administrator, teaching will always be my passion, and it is the central mission of higher education. For this reason, inspiring faculty to make their classrooms into sites of active and transformative learning and promoting faculty development related to teaching are among my most important responsibilities as a senior professor and leader.