Statement of Teaching Philosophy

"Stay hungry." Every May, I release my students into the world with these words: an academic blessing, couched as a challenge. I want to cast the pursuit of knowledge as a venture so compelling that it feels like hunger. These words reflect the core elements of my teaching philosophy: to foster student autonomy and collaboration, to ensure authenticity by having students interact with primary source materials, and to uphold the highest standards of performance and accountability possible by giving and receiving regular feedback. To guide students toward independent scholarship, I designate exploration as a homework assignment in my syllabus design, carving out specific dates and times for students to investigate online archives without the pressure to produce immediate written results. I also incorporate modular projects to allow for increasing student choice over time.

To promote collaboration, I design courses that encourage students to engage with the community. Along these lines, my first proposed course, "Markets Large and Small: Understanding Global Food Ways," would use global food and foodways to introduce first- and second-year students to Gender and Sexuality Studies and Race and Ethnicity Studies. The course would be divided into four thematic units focusing on international food markets in terms of purpose (theories of production and consumption), place (case studies of marketplaces), product (food studies), and people (collaboration between students and the community). Specifically, students would investigate Food Justice: an intersectional form of activism that combines Feminist theory and Critical Race Studies to promote fair trade, equitable food labor, and sustainable foodways. More broadly, they would learn to use food as a lens to investigate racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identity against the backdrop of transnational labor politics. This course would help students to understand the ethical dilemmas involved in food production and consumption by connecting them with farmers, chefs, journalists, and food activists in the local community. During lessons, we will use role-play, interviews, and debates to structure our discussions of four different varieties of food markets in Japan, Mexico, Turkey, and Ethiopia. Additionally, analyzing maps, audio interviews, and print advertisements would provide students with a toolkit of Feminist and decolonial methods and theory to apply in their final project: an ePortfolio presentation of a global market for the university and the local food community. This course design reflects the findings of my pedagogic research with Cornell's Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE): assignments that provide autonomy, community, and authenticity promote engagement with course material as well as long-term commitment to social inquiry and research. I plan to continue to research the questions raised by my Teagle Fellowship work on technology's role in developing students' cultural competencies throughout my career, evaluating the classroom applications of new technologies as they emerge.

I take an interdisciplinary approach in my selection of teaching tools and techniques by using a broad portfolio of approaches to both lesson content and process. Whether I am teaching an introductory course or a specialized seminar, I never take the physical configuration of the room for granted. For me, classroom layout is a tool for fostering engagement. I often ask students to get up from their seats, creating facing rows to increase debate intensity, emptying space to ease circulation for polls, and clustering in islands to create discrete stations for separate activities. These techniques stem from communicative language teaching, but they apply many other disciplines well. Choosing the most appropriate teaching technique to promote a learning goal often means reaching across fields – while clickers predominate in large science and math courses, I have used them to spark debates in small writing seminars, pushing students to identify how institutional structures affect knowledge production by shaping our conceptions of gender and race. Just as I chose the most appropriate teaching method for the learning goal by traversing field boundaries, I take a similarly interdisciplinary approach to teaching content and methodology.

In teaching a section of "Food, Gender, and Culture," I centered the historic cookbooks lesson on how transnational flows affect the production, circulation and use of these texts across global borders and boundaries. Similar issues of migration and culture ground my second proposed course, "From Colonial East Africa to Postcolonial Europe." This advanced seminar uses cultural historiography to connect settler colonialism in East Africa with current formations of migration and diaspora in multi-ethnic Europe. Through students-as-teachers activities and guided research modules, this seminar would prepare advanced undergraduates and graduates students to engage in independent research. We would also examine the problematics of the colonial archive, giving special attention to issues of access and information flow in private collections and government repositories. In terms of the course structure, the seminar would follow a thematic rather than a chronological or geographical sequence. By moving from the theme of nationality to community to family to self, the tightening course focus would underscore the enmeshed nature of Africa and Europe, past and present, other and self. To model inclusive approaches to historical inquiry, this course would integrate decolonial content and skill instruction. In terms of the course materials, the reading list emphasizes the voices of East African and Italo-East African historians, authors, poets, directors, and journalists. And in terms of the pedagogical approach, class activities would demonstrate a range of methods specifically geared to investigate the history of those who did not write it.

To maintain high standards in the classroom, I seek daily evidence that my students are learning. This evidence takes a variety of forms: written and oral reflection, assignments that pose students as teachers, and open discussion of my pedagogic methods with students. I tailor my approach to class size and constituency, using a variety of strategies. For instance, I use reflection as an in-class activity to promote further learning. Every day, the opening and concluding activities include questions that encourage students to personally connect with and apply the material. By discussing students' answers in pairs, small groups, or with the class as a whole, the students and I can acknowledge progress, track degree of engagement, and spot potential areas for review on both individual and group levels. Having every student teach a lesson to the class provides numerous steps and opportunities for in-class feedback: they must analyze a text, apply important concepts, synthesize the material, and trouble-shoot if necessary. I draw a distinction between assessment and criticism: to learn, students need to know what they're doing right as well as wrong. To encourage the repetition of successful learning strategies, I point out how students' hard work translates into refined understanding of course content and improved skills. By providing opportunities to apply and extend what students have learned, I can track their mastery of the subject.

I apply these high standards to my teaching as well by soliciting student evaluations one-third of the way into my courses. This strategy permits me to take the temperature of the course and to tailor my techniques to meet the specific needs of each class. To measure my teaching effectiveness, every two weeks I ask students to write one-minute papers at the end of class on what has been helpful, and what has been challenging. Inviting colleagues to observe my teaching and requesting classroom visits to study their techniques allow me to pursue teaching excellence. Filming my classes for review with CTE also helps me to see how I appear to the students in my classroom, and to make necessary adjustments such as moving around the classroom so all students can see me clearly, calling on students seated in far corners, and allowing students sufficient time to formulate thoughtful responses to oral questions. Refining my skills as a teacher will be a career-long professional development project.

Mentorship guides my pedagogic approach to engaging with a diverse student body. Teaching students how to create and sustain relationships with field experts and with one another not only promotes equity of access to university resources but also teaches students to connect with people who are different from themselves. Although fostering collaboration with the university community provides a key means for women and historically underrepresented groups to succeed, we rarely provide opportunities for students to practice these skills as part of their classwork. When I teach, I build mentorship into the syllabus. First, I model collaboration through in-class activities as a group. For instance, I taught a "Gender Online" lesson by organizing a Skype discussion on online harassment with journalist Amanda Hess. My Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies students enthused that this activity "seemed like real work, not busy work." In the short term, these activities support difference by incorporating diverse voices into the course materials and methods. And in the long term, they help students to build relationships with advanced scholars and practitioners, setting them up for future success in their chosen field. Having modeled mentorship in the classroom, I then assign it for homework. In my "European Modernism" seminar, one homework assignment asked students to visit a space on campus that they had never entered before, and to chat with a librarian, curator, or docent about that space's resources. This mentorship assignment prepares students for their research to come by forging a personal connection with a new research space, a critical link for students who are the first in their families to attend college and may not know what university resources are available to them. When learning takes place in new spaces beyond the traditional classroom setting, students with a range of backgrounds and abilities can connect with their peers through shared exploration, resulting in greater cultural competency for all involved. These assignments nudge students towards building their personal networks both on campus and beyond it by offering clear guidelines to approach this daunting task. Connecting diverse students with experts alerts them to the fact that our course materials made by real people with whom they can talk, and that they can take an active role in creating new ideas through these mentorships, thus launching their studies into the wider world.