

I integrate pedagogical methods and practices from the fields of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Asian American Studies, American Studies, and Cultural Studies. Course materials are drawn from a variety of disciplines (e.g. History, Sociology, Cultural Studies, Women's Studies) and sources (oral histories, films/documentaries, texts). This interdisciplinary approach cultivates the creation of dynamic lectures and class discussions as well as the growth of students' critical thinking and writing skills and reflects my years of experience teaching in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. I teach a variety of GVSU courses that highlight this expertise including, but not limited to: Introduction to Intercultural Competence and Communication; Diversity in the United States; Visionary Thinkers: Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs; and Meaning.<sup>1</sup>

### **Cultivating Student Success in the Classroom**

The courses that I design are rigorous in their curriculum, and students engage with course material on multiple levels through assigned readings, in-class activities, and multimedia. Students participate in an interactive classroom rooted in active learning. Addressing the pedagogical impact on student participation, a student from Winter 2015 in LIB 201: Diversity in the United States notes: "I was not the MOST active participant in class, however the instructor presented material in a manner that made it relevant to students' own lives, which allowed me to speak up in class more than I would typically be comfortable with." I deploy an intersectional approach to foster students' intellectual engagement with issues and concepts such as implicit bias, meritocracy, social justice, health disparities, racial profiling. Intersectionality accounts for the macro- and micro-levels of oppression and privilege that result from one's location at the nexus of race, gender, class, nation, ability, and sexuality. For example, students enrolled in Diversity in the United States investigate the connections between health disparities and environmental racism as they view *The Faces of Environmental Injustice in Cincinnati* (2002) and read excerpts from Eileen McGurty's *Transforming Environmentalism* (Rutgers University Press, 2007). This reflects my commitment in teaching students to situate a concept or issue within a broader historical and social context.

Courses require students to reexamine their worldviews, engage in peer learning, and learn to develop a cogent, well-defined position on a topic. As a result, students strengthen their understanding of self as they examine how their lived experiences shape their engagement with the world. I enhance students' ability to communicate their ideas and understanding of the course materials to one another as well as increase their confidence to convey their knowledge to the professor. Addressing classroom environment, students comment:

- "Brought a clever wit and sense of humor that kept discussion interesting and allowed students to become more comfortable to collaborate ideas with one another and offer personal viewpoints. Open-minded, well-informed, and makes students feel that their opinions are relevant." (Diversity in the United States, Winter 2015)
- "I think this course should be required for students. It broadened my perspective on a lot of educational, political, media and social issues. Though it was extremely effective in my senior year, I think it would have also been a great addition to my freshman course schedule earlier on in my undergraduate journey." (Introduction to Intercultural Competence and Communication, Fall 2014)

Central to my pedagogy is a belief in holistic learning where I encourage students to explore the applicability of course content to current debates, controversies, and/or events. In *Visionary Thinkers: Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs* I connect course material exploring Kochiyama and Lee Boggs, their collaboration with

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that I have only taught *Visionary Thinkers: Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs* online and have taught *Diversity in the US* in face-to-face and hybrid formats. Unless otherwise noted, other courses only are taught in the face-to-face format.

the Black Panthers and Nation of Islam, and the 1967 Detroit Riots with the protests in Ferguson, MO and Baltimore, MD following deaths of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray, respectively. Students explore the similarities and differences between Civil Rights Movement era activism and activism associated with #BlackLivesMatter and #Asians4BlackLives. Yet our engagement with twenty-first century activism and events is not limited to issues of race. In Introduction to Intercultural Competence and Communication during Winter 2015, we discussed Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 2015 and what is commonly known as "bathroom bills" that negatively impact transgender individuals' access to restroom facilities. This examination occurred as we conducted a broader discussion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) rights.

To encourage the development of students' critical writing skills, I clearly articulate essay expectations and provide concise grading rubrics. For my online or hybrid courses, I use Blackboard's rubric feature and create assignment videos to navigate students through the directions as a tool to replicate the face-to-face assignment instructions. In addition, I employ a scaffolding model to ensure students are equipped with the tools necessary to complete final assignments. For example, in Summer 2014 I revised the final assignment and grading rubric for all sections of Introduction to Intercultural Competence and Communication. During the 2014-2015 academic year, students were required to complete a research proposal, annotated bibliography, and research paper. Students receive formative feedback on the research proposal and annotated bibliography to support the completion of the final assignment.

As part of my dedication to strengthening students' critical writing skills, I encourage students to meet with me prior to paper deadlines. The meetings are invaluable as students can troubleshoot their ideas and are encouraged to expand on the goals they have for the course. Examples of the success of this approach include:

- In Fall 2014 a student in my Diversity in the United States course met with me as he developed his final paper. Providing feedback on multiple drafts of his work allowed him to increase his confidence in writing.
- In Winter 2015 an international student in Introduction to Intercultural Competence and Communication course increased her English-language writing proficiency as I provided continuous, formative feedback during one-on-one meetings over the course of the semester. By the end of the semester her self-assurance speaking and writing in English was evident in group presentations and final paper.

Even as I am focused on developing their writing skills, small and large group discussions encourage students to raise questions concerning the meaning of the text and intent of the author. I also utilize the "two-minute pair and share" technique students discuss the same question in pairs. This active learning strategy encourages students to summarize what they gained from a particular reading and allows for peer-learning. Their confidence in public speaking increases as pairs share their findings or key points with the larger class.

Preparing students to intellectually engage with material through critical thinking and writing alongside discussions and lectures aid students' overall growth as active university citizens. To deepen students' analyses of course material, I design worksheets with key questions to breakdown their investigation of a text. These handouts strengthen students' ability to make connections between a text and broader course questions. For example, in Diversity in the United States, I employ this method to strengthen students' analysis of Ruben Martinez's "The Crossing" from the edited volume *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing* (Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2013, Ninth Edition). The worksheet requires students to apply their ethical reasoning skills in their examination of the ethical dilemma concerning whether to aid an undocumented immigrant at the US/Mexico border. On their end of term evaluations, the majority of my students report that assignments enhanced their analytical skills.

Students enrolled in all of my courses continually comment that they enjoy the course's mixed multimedia approach to learning. I utilize memes, videos, films/documentaries, and television to enhance course

readings. Course multimedia allows students to consider the direct application of gender and critical race theories to popular culture. As we interrogate the concepts of racial microaggressions and implicit bias in Introduction to Intercultural Competence and Communication, students view the video “What Kind of Asian are You?” by Ken Tanaka (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWynJkN5HbQ>). Deploying comedy, this video highlights the everyday insults and indignities Asian Americans encounter as a result of the perpetual foreigner myth that assumes all persons of Asian descent are non-US citizens. The video encourages high-level discussion, while also allowing students to distance themselves from complicity in the perpetuation of racial microaggressions. The deployment of various techniques to enhance students’ experiences inside and outside the classroom speaks to my investment in high levels of student engagement. Commenting on the effectiveness of media to enhance learning, students note:

- “Amidst a tough class load this semester, I found myself fully invested in completely these assignments, participating in discussions and watching the ‘optional’ videos because they were interesting and unique...I underestimated the passion I would have for the subjects we learned about. The different topics, class discussions, videos, documentaries, emails...they all added up to make for a well-rounded method of teaching.” (Introduction to Intercultural Competence and Communication, Fall 2014)
- “Although it is a lot of work, this professor was always organized and knew her material very well. She is able to connect concepts [sic] to real-life examples, and we watch some videos in order to get a visual about what is really happening.” (Diversity in the United States, Winter 2015)

My commitment to bolstering students’ classroom experience is also reflected in my online and hybrid courses’ lecture modules. I create interactive videos blending my lectures with YouTube videos, music files, and documentaries. In Visionary Thinkers: Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs, students learn about Asian American activist folk trio, A Grain of Sand. To enhance their learning experience, I include full versions of four songs: “Jonathan Jackson,” “We are the Children,” “Wandering Chinaman,” and “Somos Asiaticos (We are Asians).” I believe that having students listen to the lyrics as well as read the analysis of the trio’s contributions to the Asian American movement in Daryl Maeda’s *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009) strengthens their understanding of how music is a form of activism. Later in the semester, we further investigate music as activism when students compare and contrast contemporary artist’s songs (Common’s “A Song for Assata,” Blue Scholars’ “Yuri Kochiyama,” and John Legend featuring Common’s “Glory”) with A Grain of Sand.

Furthermore, I am invested in supporting students’ growth as intellectuals inside and outside of the classroom. I actively encourage students’ interests in graduate school or study abroad. As someone who studied abroad as an undergraduate and attended graduate school abroad, I recognize the value of learning in new environments and cultural contexts. I share my experiences with students to demystify what it means to live, study, and work outside of the US. I have written seven letters of recommendation for students interested in social work, medical school, and study abroad at European, African, and Asian institutions.

### **The Value of Students’ Feedback**

Complementing my teaching philosophy is the integration of student feedback into my courses. I continually seek to improve my teaching and enhance students’ overall intellectual experience in the classroom. Becoming attuned to how they experience the course material allows me to not only make changes “in the moment” during the semester, but also in subsequent iterations of a course. The combination of student discursive feedback along with student evaluation scores allows me to reflect on whether I achieve my teaching goals. I also reflect on my lectures, which leads to the revision of lesson plans and lecture notes to increase effectiveness. Making changes in response to student feedback enhances their learning experience.

Evaluations of my teaching help me to assess whether I am effectively meeting my pedagogical goals. Students provide feedback in a variety of ways: midterm evaluations, final discursive evaluations, formal end-of-semester University surveys, informal in-class feedback, and informal feedback provided via email, Skype

or during office hours. Multiple formats ensure I am able to continually make adjustments to the course in response to student needs. I strive to continually respond “in the moment” to students’ classroom needs, changing the lesson plan to accommodate students’ interests during class. For example, when students had lingering questions concerning Orientalism’s persistence in the twenty-first century in the Spring/Summer 2015 iteration of Visionary Thinkers: Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs, I created a mid-week commentary lecture module clarifying Orientalism’s manifestations in contemporary society.

The active solicitation of student feedback during the semester allows me to address their concerns and make modifications to the course schedule to maximize their learning experience. In all courses, students complete a mid-semester evaluation to assess what is effective and what could be improved upon. To ensure transparency in how I synthesize, evaluate, and incorporate this feedback, students receive a summary of key findings and comments.

In addition to the university’s end of semester evaluation, students complete an informal, anonymous, discursive evaluation. This informal evaluation allows me to solicit students’ opinions who may not complete the University’s online end of term evaluation. As a result of feedback in the Fall 2014 Diversity in the United States course, I revised my reading response assignment for future iterations of the face-to-face course. Instead of having students submit responses in class and risk them thinking these reflections are papers, students submit responses via the Blackboard Journal feature to create a more informal atmosphere.

Students’ constructive criticism improves my teaching. In response to Fall 2014 students’ comments concerning hesitancy to participate in class discussion, I now offer students the opportunity to connect via Twitter. Students may retweet articles relating to course material to my Twitter account, allowing shier students a new avenue to demonstrate their engagement with course material. This integration of Twitter reflects the fact that I believe class participation does not look like one particular model.

To complement student feedback and my personal reflections, I solicit advice from mentors, colleagues, and peers. Discussions with colleagues provide insight into new teaching tools and new perspectives about improving classroom discussion or negotiating a class that resists critically reflecting upon controversial and sensitive topics. As part of my investment in learning more about the GVSU community, I participate in a variety of Faculty Teaching and Learning Center and Instructional Design for eLearning (IDeL) trainings, institutes, and workshops. For more information, please see my Faculty Annual Reports.