

## Teaching and Mentorship Statement

As an educator and cultural rhetorician, I am committed to an inclusive pedagogical practice that takes place in classroom spaces and beyond, through mentorship and community engagement. In the classroom, one of my primary goals is to help a diverse array of students understand how rhetorical production can contribute to social justice, while also illustrating how certain rhetorical practices work against marginalized communities. Beyond interpretation and composition of academic texts, in my courses I make a conscious effort to showcase real-life applications of multimodal and civic writing, and to do so by utilizing diverse case studies and examples of social justice advocacy. Students tend to recognize and seek out these kinds of pedagogical experiences by taking various courses with me.

Besides inclusive course content and pedagogical practices, I provide spaces for students to explore their goals and visions for a better world. In my role as an unofficial advisor and mentor to several undergraduate students at my current institution, mentees make appointments to meet with me regularly, eager to discuss professional options that would allow them to advance the projects we discuss in class. Some of these students have expressed interest in a graduate career that continues to advance the project of diverse social movements we study in class. I believe this is influenced by their perceptions of my efforts to use academic spaces for exchanges regarding the advancement of diversity by including communities outside of the academy. For instance, in organizing an event for the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky, I invited artists who could speak to histories of Puerto Rican migration, and I reached out to the local Spanish-speaking community radio station to advertise the event. The event drew in students, professors, and administrators of the university, but also community members that drove up to an hour to make it to the event. Most importantly, the event provided opportunities for students to converse with artists and community members who shared their commitment to make visible the struggles of the Latinx community that students are also part of.

Outside of the classroom, too, I engage students in a variety of spaces that allow them to recognize potential applications of their expertise. Always mindful about location, I make a conscious effort to connect the curriculum to the geography of the institution. At the University of Kentucky, this includes attending to efforts towards reckoning with the histories of marginalized communities in Lexington, Kentucky. Taking students through the African American Heritage Trail, we noticed that several signs had been taken down—and we discussed this as a symptom of the socio-political environment in 2019. I let students know that I had informed the organizers about the missing signs, and a few weeks later students noted that the signs were up again. Modeling this effort, students have become involved in organizations that advance diversity and inclusion within the University, such as the LGBTQ+ Resource Center. In other institutions I have taught in the past, students have ended up taking internships with organizations they started researching in one of my classes, such as the New York Public Interest

Research Group, which extends their professional experience beyond the university. Because of my social justice orientation to education, I believe that institutes of higher education should be engaged in the broader community in which they are situated.

At the core of my teaching and mentorship philosophy is the valuing of collaborative approaches to knowledge building towards equity, whether these collaborations are amongst students, or distinct generations of scholars, or scholars and community members. Horizontal mentorship is an example of a collaborative approach that advances projects of diversity and inclusion at a broader scale. This was the case when I worked as a graduate teaching mentor at Syracuse University, informing fellow graduate students about the insights regarding diversity and inclusion gathered through experience. As an assistant professor I have participated in conference presentations wherein the labor of mentorship is conceived as a feminist practice and activism. I have contributed an understanding of horizontal mentorship that attends to the ethics of knowledge production and political practice across multiple borders. These borders are oftentimes geopolitical, or identity-based, but they are also epistemic. I have applied such principles in my own mentoring of graduate students in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies, the Department of English, and the Program in Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies at the University of Kentucky.

Advocating for an interdisciplinary perspective that advances conversations and connections across disciplinary boundaries, I often take advantage of opportunities provided by academic conferences to mentor graduate students who I have not had in my classes. For example, serving as a session facilitator in the graduate student run Kentucky Women's and Gender Studies Conference, I was able to introduce graduate students to senior scholars with similar research interests to them. Similarly, while moderating the Fall Symposium for the Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies in 2019, I engaged graduate students from different disciplines in a conversation about the ethics behind diverse methodological approaches. And in recruiting events with my home department, I have drawn in students interested in the Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies courses I have taught, while also pointing to the diverse array of expertise our faculty offer. All of these examples illustrate my believe in a horizontal model of mentorship, where the point is to connect across nodes of interest in spite of scholarly divisions.

Being a DiaspoRican—a Puerto Rican woman living in and out of diaspora—has taught me to be conscious of how linguistic and cultural conditions influence my writing, scholarship, and teaching, as well as my approach to mentoring diverse students. As a result of this positionality, I understand the importance of recognizing identity-based concerns in both professional settings and in day-to-day lived experiences. This understanding comes across in my professional teaching experience and mentorship. In other words, I am personally committed to helping students who face similar experiences navigating the creation of communities outside of home places and home departments, to reflect upon the impact we can have in creating a more equitable academy and general society. In short, it is my goal to create spaces where inclusion and diversity not only exist, but where they become a mindset, a way of being.