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1 March 2021

French Teaching Philosophy Statement

As a researcher of medieval French literature and contemporary video games, my approach to teaching also reaches across and between disciplines. The second language classroom ought to be a space for interdisciplinary discovery where students should explore culturally relevant material in other courses outside of my own. Language does not exist in a vacuum and neither should the language classroom. I therefore seek out collaborative opportunities with colleagues, be it in history, music, art and art history, government, theatre, math, or the sciences. Cross-course projects and faculty guest lectures are just two examples of the type of trans-departmental events that demonstrate interdisciplinary efforts. The materials and media I use in class also vary greatly, which ensures the curriculum reflects a multimedia structure and provides opportunities for students to engage with as many sources and in as many formats as possible. In addition to the material of my language classroom, my experience teaching across a broad range of topics in English language and literature, French language and literature, culture, and even rowing outside of the classroom have informed this diversity.

The interconnectivity of my approach requires that my teaching also be driven by empathy and compassion. As a teacher of French as a second language, it is critical to my professional identity to remember that French is also my second language and that I was once in a situation very similar to that of my students. I relate to the difficulties and nuances of learning French as an English speaker, and I extend that compassion to non-anglophone students of French as third and fourth-language learners. An empathetic approach to language learning recognizes the vibrancy and vitality of language and rejects the notion of a perfect accent and prescriptive grammar, for instance. Instead, my approach emphasizes comprehensibility and communication, which removes pressure from students as it decenters the correct answer and embodies the multiplicity inherent in learning any subject. By emphasizing communication between students, my classes are student-centered and foster connection. This approach opens up more than one path to course objectives and renders my classroom more accessible to a wider array of students, especially to those who respond to different learning styles.

Be it in-person or virtual, the creation of an accessible classroom environment is essential to my teaching philosophy. By accessibility here, I mean the degree to which I create a level playing field so all students, regardless of ability, can engage with the material in meaningful ways. In the French classroom, I make my courses accessible by ensuring the language I use is inclusive. Since French is a highly gendered language, many students whose gender identity or expression may not correspond with the binary and traditionally grammatically masculine dominance of French. As any modern language, French is rapidly evolving to reflect the population of its speakers. By showing students that gender construction in French is fluid, my classroom permits them to see all possibilities and to express themselves as authentically as they can and invites the world outside

classroom walls inside. Other forms of accessibility in my courses include collaborating with colleagues to ensure that Individual Education Plans are carried out at the secondary and post-secondary levels, and providing alternative (i.e. digital, modified, bilingual) forms of materials to accommodate student needs. Finally, I noticed many of my students have struggled with rigid grading schema, which detracts from their ability to acquire, retain, and recall content; to counteract this I gamify my courses and establish a grading system that allows students to build their way to the grade they deserve. Because not every student responds to the same assignment, assessment, or objective similarly, course gamification offers students a more independent learning module and greater control over their path. My focus on accessibility assures the curriculum reflects as many learners as possible.

If interdisciplinarity, communication, and accessibility are the guiding tenets of my philosophy, then educational technology is the means through which they can be enacted. The past year during the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated that most educators become fluent in different forms of technology in the classroom, from Adobe to Zoom, in order to ensure safety for everyone and academic continuity. In my research, I compare widely different types of media together as I analyze medieval French texts and modern video games. In the classroom, I extend this same principle and utilize digital tools to complement lessons and create opportunities for connection, and the tools do not need to be specifically designed for educational purposes. For example of everyday technology in the classroom, I have used Twitter in the classroom to demonstrate to students the importance of paraphrasing, word choice, and use of images alongside text in both French and English. This exercise was engaging for students because Twitter is a platform most of them are familiar with, and it invited creativity and critical thinking through the natural character limits of Twitter. On the other hand, Flipgrid, the educational video discussion site, has been key to student self-expression and communication; Flipgrid provides a safe digital environment for students to record themselves speaking, and their peers to respond and create conversations through the video-forum structure. These are only a couple of the media that have been invaluable to continued student success over my teaching career and especially during the destabilizing effects the global pandemic has had on education.

Overall, my career in education and my approach to life generally are guided by an inclusive and optimistic philosophy. The classroom comprises a space and a mindset; it requires student-centered collaboration, compassion, and open-mindedness in order to foster the sense of belonging and purpose that are so important to my role as an educator. By emphasizing interdisciplinarity, empathy, accessibility, and communication in the classroom and by making use of the digital tools available to teachers, I hope to empower students to tread their own path as they navigate their way through high school, higher education, and beyond.