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Teaching Philosophy

Many of the jobs students are preparing for and therefore how we teach journalism courses has shifted from centering on three traditional sectors—print, radio, and television—to an ever-evolving combination of physical and digital spheres. Despite those changes, I see three foundational areas that remain integral for an undergraduate education in mass communications and are central to my pedagogy: foundation writing skills, media literacy, and building confidence in students and their abilities.

Completing a mass communication degree and maintaining a successful career in almost any field requires strong communication, which is often grounded in writing. While media production and consumption live predominantly in a digital and visual world, students still need to understand the basic mechanics and writing structures that underpin all media. Since reporting courses are often a requirement for a variety of majors, I take time throughout each semester to help students understand how learning to research, write, and edit a news article will help them develop press releases, craft better questions for on-air interviews, write concise and clear television scripts, or communicate information more effectively to stakeholders. Recognizing that, I structure my journalism skills courses as a type of writing boot camp by starting with sentence structure and punctuation and working up to synthesizing sources, research, and observations into a succinct article. Next, students use those basic techniques to write a variety of stories, starting with a traditional "person-on-the-street" interview and expanding into a breaking news simulation, a podcast script, and turning those pieces into social media posts.

Before reaching those assignments, students often feel uncertain about their writing skills or intimidated by the AP stylebook when learning basic reporting principles. Recognizing those concerns, I meet students at their knowledge level and work with them to improve their writing rather than pushing them to achieve a high grade. In one beginning reporting section, a student who learned English as a second language shared that she received a poor grade in her introductory English class, which made her concerned about learning a new writing style. I helped her improve in her writing skills and confidence throughout that semester by providing multiple avenues for additional out-of-class practice assignments, options to revise and resubmit assignments, frequent "story conferences" in office hours discussing each of her articles and my grading comments, along with referring her to the university's writing center for additional tutoring. Additionally, I shared with her and other students in similar situations that their fears are natural, if unwarranted, and that most of their classmates share their doubts. I also take the chance to explain my own setbacks while in their position, while writing professionally, and that I am still improving my writing today.

Improving media literacy, as an avenue toward improved critical thinking, is the second key goal of my pedagogy. Even students who do not enter one of the many professional fields within mass communications will still engage with and even produce media every day that will inform how they understand and interact with their surroundings. I do not attempt to change their beliefs or convince them to take on my viewpoints, rather I ask them to understand and reflect on how and why they use and/or create media so they can be informed users who make conscious choices about the media they consume. Outside of explaining the basic concept of media literacy and its link to critical thinking, I tailor the conversations to both the broader course topic and objects along with the media technology or content students enjoy. In general mass media and society courses, I introduce a variety of ethical and legal perspectives to understand how

corporate ownership structures dictate what content is on students' favorite streaming service or how free social media platforms make money by selling user data. In journalism writing courses, this takes the form of analyzing how different news outlets cover stories developing during that semester, research-heavy assignments that emphasize the importance of expert opinions and help students properly attribute ideas, and editing exercises that ask students to evaluate their own writing for opinion statements and biases. Pushing students to practice critical thinking by thoughtfully analyzing the information and content they consume is another transferable skill that I see as foundational to their larger college education and personal growth.

The last crucial part of my teaching philosophy is helping students improve their self-confidence in their skills practiced in-class and their overall belief that they can transfer those abilities to professions and challenges outside of the collegiate environment. In addition to the nerves students can face learning a new skill or mastering AP style, many experience a general sense of imposter syndrome or feel an intense pressure to achieve perfect grades from family members. A first-semester freshman student in a general media and society course shared with me that she felt pressure to master new material and achieve an A in the class because her two older brothers were both professional journalists. She felt disheartened when her early grades were good but not perfect and explained she felt she was not living up to the standard set by her brothers. After hearing and validating her concerns, I asked her about her brothers' college experience and helped her release that just a few years prior, they were also learning the same concepts and practicing the same skills before they became leaders in their field. I helped her and similar students become more comfortable in the classroom and with the inevitable challenges that come with college-level work by giving them space to explain their concerns and supporting them with regular check-ins, providing extra study or writing resources, and breaking down myths about college.

Leading classrooms ranging from 18 to 165 students has challenged me to be hands-on with students even in large, traditionally lecture-style courses. I achieve this by reformatting syllabi to include a variety of activities and discussion days that cater to multiple learning modalities to give each student an access point into new material. While teaching COMM 100, a general education introductory course on mass media, I reformatted the traditionally lecture-heavy course to include small group discussion days and short reflective writing assignments. Each discussion session was led by student-submitted questions, which provided an avenue for students to shape the direction of their own learning in a tangible way and helped me better understand which topics students most wanted to explore or what material they were struggling with. Those sessions also helped students who may have felt uncomfortable talking in a large group setting practice speaking and listening to new classmates weekly. Each discussion session was paired with a short reflective writing assignment which gave students a third modality to engage with course content and offered another way for me to check in with students. The switch from solely lectures to dedicated discussion days and open conversations throughout class sessions by encouraging student questions and feedback allowed students to meet course learning objectives while exploring whichever aspects of a media industry they found most interesting.

Focusing on those three areas demonstrates my approach to teaching, including my willingness to work with students as individuals and meeting them where they are, welcoming different perspectives, beliefs, and backgrounds into the classroom conversation, and knowing that a college education is not just about test scores and degrees, but helping students grow and better understand who they are as people.