

## Teaching Personal Statement

Five elements characterize my teaching philosophy at Washington and Lee University: strategic practice, realistic production, symbolic proficiency, conceptualizing power, and resilience. Collectively, these elements promote the cognitive and affective development of young people as thinkers, makers, and doers in media and communication industries. As an assistant professor, I routinely encourage students to reflect on how messages they want to send impact others. Through course readings, discussions, and assignments, students advance socio-cultural awareness and emotional intelligence while interrogating assumptions about phenomena around them.

Strategic practice constitutes the first element of my teaching philosophy. In *JOUR 227: Public Relations Writing* students learn how to craft deliverables, such as press releases and success stories by completing worksheets to target audiences through structured narratives. For each deliverable, student-writers progress from draft to revision to final revision showcased in an online portfolio. Alongside my feedback, students strategically refine not only how and what to write but for whom. In *JOUR 101: Introduction to Mass Communications*, I mentor predominantly first-year students through scaffolding a substantive research paper. The strategic approach to writing demystifies the research process, builds confidence, and emphasizes metacognitive reflection. As another strategic layer to the paper, students engage with artifacts from Special Collections, which include a wide range of socio-political discourses, such as gender in advertisements and race and ethnicity in World War II propaganda. Artifacts and their messages become touchstones for students to make sense of contemporary discourses in media and communication.

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Realistic production comprises the second element of my teaching philosophy. Generally, creative people in public relations and advertising work as strategic communicators in-house for an organization or for an agency with a variety of clients. To mirror reality, I structure courses in the strategic communication degree track to model professional environments. In JOUR 227, I created Solvent Blue ([solventblue.weebly.com](http://solventblue.weebly.com)), a fictional environmental consulting firm, to hire students as entry-level practitioners working in house. Students translate corporate jargon into plain language, research science to communicate it, respond to supervisor requests under time constraints, and collaborate with an actual 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Adventure Scientists ([adventurescientists.org](http://adventurescientists.org)). The line between what's real and what isn't begins to blur as students perceive stakes to what they produce. Next, in *JOUR 273: Principles of Public Relations*, students join Trident PR, a fictional public relations agency, where they triage and remedy problems for simulated clients, responding to dilemmas in corporate social responsibility, identifying issues and mitigating crisis, mapping social media strategy, and envisioning stunts.

Symbolic proficiency accounts for the third element. Both JOUR 227 and JOUR 273 draw on textual and visual communication proficiency, such as multimodal framing, for persuasive message design. Rather than privilege words over images, students learn how image-text congruency reinforces message retention and amplifies emotional effect. For example, when students produce a slide deck to pitch a prospective client, they envision the deck's image-text totality, synthesizing terse copy and selective imagery for optimal engagement.

Conceptualizing power stands as the fourth element. Understood in several ways, power may be enacted productively and unproductively through human social relations. In JOUR 101, students gain tools to interrogate processes and outcomes of power communicated through media. For example, students apply the concepts of denotation and connotation from semiotics to

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rhetoric about critical race theory (CRT) by pundits on partisan broadcast news. Coupled with frame theory, students assess attempts by commentators to mainstream unpopular connotations as the CRT's denotative meaning. Students rightly question who benefits from naturalized negative associations about CRT. Then, flipping the script, I discuss beneficial expressions of power, namely agency through encoding/decoding theory, to counter narratives that reinforce racial and ethnic hierarchy.

Resilience constitutes the fifth and final element of my teaching philosophy. In JOUR 227, I regularly embed ambiguities into assignments, which inevitably stokes anxiety. To cope, students learn ways to advocate for themselves to produce their best work. For example, students may receive incomplete direction from imagined supervisors to write a deliverable. Students craft solutions by triangulating resources, using best judgement, and tactfully emailing supervisors for more information. Additionally, students and I discuss power dynamics in the workplace. Together, we navigate scenarios that can evoke unease and strategize solutions using competencies learned.

In sum, I view my teaching as responsive. When students struggle, I find ways to meet them where they are at. For example, I use animation and narrative to illustrate theory and practice both visually and verbally. I also provide students with mechanisms for anonymous feedback to improve lectures, discussions, and assignments. Students know that the labor I ask of them will benefit them in the future because they see their growth in the present.