

Teaching Philosophy: Kimberly Lacey

An undergraduate mentor of mine once said, “The secret behind every lecture is how to be more like me.” Although I have selected texts, crafted assignments, and designed syllabi around semester-long themes that appeal to my tastes and will also challenge my students, I step into my classroom every day and realize my professor could not be more wrong. With nearly five years of college-level teaching experience, I could now call my mentor and tell him that I have learned some new secrets of my own: every class meeting emphasizes a different perspective than mine.

Since Wayne State University is located in downtown Detroit, my teaching experience has embraced the city’s multi-cultural milieu. The diverse student population at Wayne State is a text in itself. I have created and taught over twenty courses at Wayne State, and yet each one is so remarkably different because of the student-led classroom discussions and course material created by the students. For example, Detroit hosted the Super Bowl in 2006. I used this nationally important event as a localized theme for ENG 1020: Introduction to College Writing in which all students had to introduce visitors to some “hot-spots” of the city based on their personal experiences. Each student maintained a blog and posted weekly updates on their “best of” lists: best place for coffee on campus, best spot to avoid Super Bowl crowds, best local restaurant on a college student’s budget. For the final project, students created a brochure featuring a topic of their choice. There was an impressive range of subjects, from underground music culture to break-dancing, local theaters to architecture, and sports to race riots. Each theme reflected an individual perception of the student’s education, personal interests, and experiences with the city itself. Although ENG 1020 is introductory writing, the students produced extremely sophisticated documents and exhibited high levels of both primary and secondary research. Research for their brochures were also presented at different stages during peer-review, allowing the students to introduce their findings to other members of the class. As a result, the students created a central knowledge base of information about Detroit’s incredibly diverse possibilities.

I have experimented with several different pedagogical approaches, but I rely most regularly on collaboration as a tool to construct knowledge together. In my Intermediate Writing and Technical Writing courses, I emphasize the importance of team writing, a skill that frightens many of the students at first. We start off slowly; each student writes the first line of a story then passes it to a different teammate. Even though creating a fictional story line-by-line is a relaxed activity, the teams begin to learn the importance of coherent communication, adopting a useable voice among all the team members, and providing constructive feedback. The students translate this activity into the skills necessary for larger documents such as project proposals.

Another way I encourage collaborative pedagogy is through the use of digital tools such as Wikis, blogs, and Google Docs. I especially like creating my course syllabi on a Wiki since I can place all the course documents, schedules, outside resources, and writing examples in one place. The Wiki is a great place for student collaboration, and my Technical Writing students create a Wiki or a Google Doc to collect and store on-going research, maintain project management goals, and share writing among team members.

In addition to writing courses, I am quite capable teaching undergraduate and graduate courses on rhetorical and critical theory, history of rhetoric, digital media, composition pedagogy, and memory studies. My wide range of research interests provides me with exciting opportunities to teach courses balancing rhetoric and composition with other disciplinary influences. For example, one course I have designed is called “Memory Manipulation.” For this course, readings begin with ancient rhetorical texts on the Sophists and lead into contemporary texts on visual and psychological influences on memory. No matter the topic, every course I teach emphasizes collaboration and digital tools to facilitate a vibrant and engaging classroom experience.