Teaching Philosophy

Leah K. S. Holz

The three key components of my teaching are (1) active student participation, (2) fostering critical thinking and writing, and (3) encouraging continued learning. I strive to create a positive, inclusive classroom where students are encouraged to be engaged citizens not only in their school, but also in the wider local and global communities. My course syllabi, course goals, and daily lesson plans are all organized through the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards for Language Learners. Those standards fit into any course that asks broad questions about the world and fosters community engagement through cultural encounters.

My students and I work together to establish accountability from the beginning of the semester, creating a contract with classroom expectations and etiquette, such as cell phone use and group work guidelines, which everyone signs and is responsible for implementing. I encourage participation through technology and am committed to incorporating new technologies in the classroom. I have received grants to create hybrid and online courses through CU Boulder and many of my teaching strategies employ the “flipped classroom method” in which we use valuable classroom time for in-depth practice and discussion and students learn main grammar concepts at home. I use programs like Quizlet for vocabulary and design homework assignments through Nearpod and online blogs to encourage class participation outside the classroom. Inside the classroom students participate playing games like Kahoot! and Nearpod for comprehension checks and group brainstorming. I use a variety of methods to develop critical thinking skills, including “pyramid discussions” to help students gain confidence speaking so they are better able to have debates about challenging topics. In my third-year French Current Events class we practiced close readings of articles while students learned reading strategies such as post-it note summaries or backwards outlining. With challenging material, for example, at the start of the U.S. travel ban in January 2017, I had students read three articles from French news sites about the executive order, one each from Le Figaro, Le Monde, and Libération. They worked in small groups, underlining facts before discussing if any element (images, word choice, text length) made each article more centrist, left or right-leaning. My students practice continued learning through self-reflection and assessments that build job skills, such as effective communication, through presentations and writing exercises. I begin units with activities such as mind maps in order to promote individual and group self-reflection. I require students to reflect on their learning process so they are aware of their own learning styles to help articulate their needs in all their classes. I am a strong supporter of study abroad as continued learning and I actively encourage my students at all levels and provide information about programs, scholarships, and grants.

I see my role as a partnership with students. One strategy I value is the use of anonymous feedback forms. I encourage students to bring their best selves to our classroom and school and I use a variety of assessments for students to share their outside interests. In a second-year French course, for example, students created a comic strip to demonstrate mastery of the passé composé and imparfait, and this assignment also provided an opening for a discussion about bandes dessinées in Francophone cultures. I have high standards for students and always provide guidance such as rubrics or guiding questions. All my courses include a community component in assessments, which can mean partner projects and participation in department events. In my third-year current events course, for example, students completed a final portfolio with community engagement as the central component. One student reflected on her experience volunteering at a retirement home, another looked at a documentary about the Syrian refugee crisis, and another created a short film about food and community in France. Further examples of student work, assessments, and sample syllabi are available on my website: www.leahksholz.com.
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My commitment to teaching excellence led me to earn the Certificate in College Teaching from CU Boulder. I am currently expanding my pedagogy research and interests into Digital Humanities; in the spring I will participate in a roundtable discussion at the Northeast MLA on digital pedagogies, sharing sample portfolio projects that include student-created online comics and Twine “choose your own adventure” narratives from my second-year writing course “Ecrire, décrire, s’exprimer.” This commitment is also exhibited by the campus-wide Teaching Excellence Award I won in 2018 and my positive faculty course evaluations, in which I consistently score above-average (5.86/6 versus 5.23, the average for the College of Arts and Sciences). I am dedicated to cultivating an inclusive classroom environment, and I actively seek out opportunities to broaden my capacity to do so as a teacher, such as my work as a discussion facilitator in Franklin and Marshall College’s Day of Dialogue and my participation in the CU Boulder Diversity and Inclusion Summit. My experience as a college student who was mentored by professors continues to influence the ways I interact with students, and I take my role as mentor seriously, fostering a positive classroom climate in order to include and encourage students of all backgrounds to engage in in-class discussions and outside events and opportunities. I am dedicated to bringing the insights of French and Francophone cultures and communities to students’ lived experiences, both at the local and global level. My main goal for students at any level is that they continue to practice critical thinking and community engagement outside the classroom.