Teaching Philosophy Statement
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From the first day of Kindergarten, I loved school. I loved everything about it. I loved the structure and organization, the excitement of learning, the challenge of assignments (in Kindergarten it was things like tying a shoe or drawing straight lines). By first grade, however, I was tired of it. The other students were slow, the teacher condescending, and the assignments boring and pointless. At home I would make my brothers play school, where I was the teacher and gave them interesting assignments that required creativity and authenticity. Due to some patient teachers along the way who looked past my aggressive intensity, I survived the trauma of early education with my love of learning intact. This year (2025) marks the 27th calendar year of my life in which I am enrolled as a student.

It is my intense love of learning that makes me want to teach. I love putting ideas and thoughts together in new ways and helping others to not just increase their understanding of a subject but to also access their own enthusiasm. For me personally, teaching is about sharing passion for a subject and having the ability to communicate information about that subject in a way that others can understand.

From the time we are born, we each find a way to make sense of the world around us based on what we already know. Every time we interpret something new it is done in the context of earlier experiences and understandings, and we learn piece by piece. Often, we make assumptions that our interpretation is correct, and rarely do we see a need to question what we think we know. One of the challenges of higher education is to help students recognize the ways they have done this over the course of their lives and identify the ways re-interpretation can be meaningful or useful. We call it critical thinking, but sometimes it can feel deeper than this as we are forced to challenge even basic, and sometimes emotional, beliefs.

One of the first steps in critical thinking is creating an environment where each student can learn to see the world from the perspective of their peers. Learning about other cultures and worldviews can help students better understand themselves in the context of others. This is one of the things I love about anthropology. Every person is special in their own way, and it is my goal to make sure each student learns what makes them unique. I hope that my enthusiasm for human culture can be interpreted by my students as enthusiasm for each of them as they are.

Vocabulary is another thing I think is critical to any kind of learning. Language is my comfort food, and every discipline has its own special language. Vocabulary is the key to understanding in any field. Words are used to provide nuance and complexity to subjects of study. They can also be used to signify to others that one has familiarity with a subject. For example, if I wrote an essay that included the words "engaged learning," "assessment," and "pedagogy," it would be clear that I was familiar with concepts taught to teachers. When I use words in casual conversations like "Holocene," "palimpsest," and "assemblage," you might think I'm rather boring (and you certainly won't get my jokes). I guess this is the price we pay for being educated.

Finally, all joking aside, it is important to assess learning in ways that encourage and uplift students. My excitement for archaeology in a classroom setting will not be of any use if a student feels marginalized or dismissed. I have found that my students are less motivated by grades than I feel I was, and points don't always matter to them. On the other hand, most of them were raised with video games, and I have found they respond to even simple games that incorporate some level of competition or socialization. Though the college and university level is a long way from Kindergarten, I think that learning in socially interactive ways still has value.

In the future, I would like to address the challenges of finding ways to incorporate social interaction even in online classes. I think that new technologies and platforms can be leveraged in both online and classroom settings to motivate students in improved ways. I let my students know they are important by responding to their emails quickly and with encouragement and humor when possible (they don't all get my jokes). I want to help them build on what they know about the world one piece at a time.