

Statement on Teaching

As you can see from my CV and this document, there is a strong correlation between my teaching and research. I have been a productive scholar since arriving at ECU and my students have been one of my primary inspirations. Many of my recent conference presentations and publications relate to my students and their contributions in the classroom, as you can see from the titles mentioned in my CV. Being an effective teacher is very important to me and I strive to constantly improve my classes for the betterment of my students. In my classes, I endeavor not only to teach the information at hand, but also teach the students how to read and think critically in the world around them.

Students will be best able to relate to materials that interest and inspire them. I make every effort to keep my information up to date, from including recent texts alongside the classics to referencing popular culture and media. I feel my greatest strength as an instructor is in my enthusiasm for the subject matter and learning itself. Above all else, I believe the students' interest in a topic is directly proportional to the instructor enthusiasm. My overall passion for the discipline and my teaching style speak to my students' needs. I introduce innovative ways of evaluating students, such as the Ghost Walk for my ENGL 2570 The Supernatural. The Ghost Walk is an event that the entire class researches, plans, and produces as a part of their major project for the class. I've done this two years in a row and I am amazed at the level of student engagement and the discussions were able to have afterwards. The readings seem more relevant after the students have conducted interviews and archival research and plan the event itself. In the past two years, I've had better class discussions and more students reading the materials than I've had in the past. The same can be said for the podcast episodes the graduate students created last year in my Folklore (ENGL 7465), the students were much more engaged with the materials and produced a higher quality project than I had seen in the past. Additionally, it has created materials for the community (in the form of the Ghost Walk and the soon-to-be released podcast, titled *Legendary*), both on and off campus, which puts ECU in a positive light for both current and future students as well as the town of Greenville.

In addition to my use of newer materials in the classroom, I also believe that students need a solid basis in both history and theory. I integrate theory into all my classes, including the introductory levels, not only because this information is important to understanding the discipline of folklore, but also because theory is less overwhelming to students if they are taught it in small increments using examples which relate to familiar concepts. By doing this, I hope to persuade my students away from thinking that theory is hard and instead give them the idea that theory is complex, but interesting and essential to the study of any discipline.

Students also need to understand the practical application of their academic work. In my classes, I try to emphasize all aspects of folklore, from the academic, public, and applied to the practical use of equipment and possible jobs for those interested in the area. I attempt to show my students that folklore offers a variety of opportunities for both personal and professional development and I emphasize that folklore is applicable to their field of study. In short, I feel that I embody all seven of the characteristics of effective teaching as outlined in ECU's Faculty Senate Resolution #91-29:

Good Organization of Subject Matter and Course: As you can see from my teaching evaluations from my peers and students, my course objectives are clear, my assignments and exams are clearly written and directly relate to the classroom discussions and readings, and I am always prepared for classes. I use time in my classroom effectively and all of my interactions with the students are designed to clearly communicate the goals of the course.

Effective Communication: One of my greatest strengths is my ability to effectively communicate with my classes. One way in which I do this is through listening to my students and utilizing the ways they communicate. In my experience, the students also learn from examples, so I give several of those in class. When we discuss legend tripping, I show the students' videos of legend trips posted online, tell them narratives of legend trips, and ask them to describe their own legend trips. When it comes time to take their exam or work on their collection projects, they have an excellent understanding of the components of a legend trip, the functions of these activities, how they fit into the history and landscape of an area, and how they reflect the cultural attitudes and norms of a region.

Knowledge of and Enthusiasm for the Subject Matter and Teaching: I think that my enthusiasm for my discipline is my greatest strength. I love teaching folklore and I love my research. I attend at least one to two conferences a year and bring what I learn back to my classes. For example, I always attend panels at conferences which directly relate to what I'm teaching that semester, where I take careful notes and shared them with the class as soon as I returned. The students were excited to hear about this and enjoyed hearing that many things they were interested in were topics of real academic research. I find our classroom discussions engaging and my students often spark my interest in my own research topics. For example, I learned about Slender Man from my students, which lead to my research on the topic, which lead to several publications on belief in Slender Man.

Positive Attitudes Toward Students: I truly enjoy interacting with my students. I find them to be very insightful and they ask questions which push me intellectually as well. Last year in *The Supernatural* a student asked me if cosplay (a portmanteau of "costume play" where participants create costumes of fictional characters, typically from sci-fi,

fantasy, and horror) was a type of ostension (where people act out urban legends). The students pointed out that it met all of the definitions of ostension they had read and we discussed in class. After a lively discussion, the students decided that some instances of cosplay could be pseudo-ostension, but only if other people recognized it as such and there was a well-known story attached to the character. While I could have cut them off at any point and explained the differences, it was much more engaging for all of us and a better learning experience to let them play with the concepts and figure it out. This is only something they can do in an environment where they feel their ideas are valued.

Fairness in Examinations and Grading: Fairness is very important to me. Once I finish grading any assignment, I immediately compare all the grades to each other to make sure that I am consistent and fair. I've created rubrics for all of my major assignments both so the students understand what is expected of them and so I also remain fair with my own grading objectives.

Flexibility in Approaches to Teaching: While lecture and discussion are two common methods of learning, I also utilize videos, comics, group projects, small group discussions in the classroom. Outside of the classroom my students are conducting observations projects, interviews, analyzing urban legends, and other activities. For the past two years, I had the class research, organize, write, plan, and produce a Ghost Walk on campus. This has been a stunning success, which has led to an increase in student engagement, including discussions on topics I was unable to discuss with the students in the past, such as the presence of Confederate ghosts near campus and legends about "hanging trees." Not only has this bit of flexibility in my class lead to two conference presentations and requests to publish, it has also inspired members of the class to form their own club "Lore and More" to help with the organization next year.

Appropriate Student Learning Outcomes: My proudest moments are when a student "gets it." In my classroom, the students quickly learn that I am not there to force my own ideas on them, rather I'm there to act as a guide and mentor. I always tell my students that they don't need to think the way I do, all I ask them to do is *think*. It is my goal not to just teach them folklore, but rather to teach them to think like a folklorist. They should question the information presented to them, especially in places like the media, the Internet, and in oral tradition. They should ask why we do the things we do and tell the stories that we tell. They should engage with opposing viewpoints to make sure they are not falling prey to their own inherent biases. I clearly make all of my goals for my classes clear and discuss how they relate to the activities, assignments, exams, and any other activities both inside and outside the classroom. My students always know where they stand with me and know I'm always available to help them understand what we are doing in classes.