Teaching Philosophy Statement

As a first-generation college student, I found the idea of higher education daunting. However, growing up with a thirst for knowledge, I knew that I wanted to pursue a college degree with the long-term goal of becoming a professor. While I faced a lot of challenges and often felt isolated, I had professors who helped me navigate the college realm. I was so appreciative of their help that once I began graduate school, I made it a point to work towards being the best educator that I could be, too. To do that, I attended different workshops, lectures, and courses focusing on how to make the college experience as inclusive as possible.

Some of these experiences included "The Inclusive STEM Teaching Project", an edX course offered by Boston University, as well as EAD 871: Collegiate Contexts for Teaching and Learning through MSU. In these courses, along with my training and background as an anthropologist, I learned more about identifying my own positionality and participating in reflexivity as both a student and an educator. These experiences have provided me insight into how each individual's background can affect their learning in the classroom, as well as ways in which I can help provide opportunities and space for each student to succeed and thrive.

In addition, I completed the competencies required for the Certificate in College Teaching, which broadened my knowledge on how to develop discipline-related teaching strategies, create effective learning environments, incorporate technology in my teaching, understand the university context, and how to assess student learning. This final competency required completing a mentored teaching project, which I completed under Dr. Nicole Geske in the Division of Human Anatomy. Dr. Geske and I sent out a survey to learn more about students' perceptions of learning in ANTR 355 (Human Anatomy Gross Laboratory), and how that perception changed after the first exam. After analyzing the data, we found that students were using several of the provided study materials, many of which they used both before and after the first exam. However, students learned how to be more efficient with their use of the given study materials. We are now able to share this with future students to help them be more efficient in their study habits earlier in the course. This experience taught me that, while students will always have their own unique needs, using assessments in the classroom can be beneficial to future student learning and success. This is a practice that I will continue in my future courses.

I have had the opportunity to teach in multiple capacities to students at varying levels. This has included traditional settings such as the college classroom and laboratory, as well as non-traditional settings, including in international archaeological field schools and at public outreach events. In the traditional classroom setting, I have given lectures to classes ranging from about ten people to 200 people in courses that ranged from low- to high-level courses. Some of these lectures in particular were associated with the Lab for the Education and Advancement in Digital Research (LEADR). I was a teaching assistant in LEADR during the 2023-2024 academic year, and the position allowed me to expand my knowledge of digital methods, research, and pedagogy in the classroom.

I was able to grow substantially as an educator in LEADR. For example, this position was one of the first where I realized that there are incorrect assumptions made by professors

about the upcoming generation. One of those assumptions is that students understand all of the technological methods and tools that we encourage (or require) them to use for assignments. Once I realized that I, too, made this assumption, I was able to pivot and use my skills and knowledge about accessibility in the classroom (as well as guidance from the LEADR director and my colleagues) to make the classes more accessible. This required creating surveys about technology understanding and usage. After looking over the surveys, I was able to design course material that began with the foundations of each digital tool for students who felt shaky with their technology use, allowing students to become more confident in class.

While I was able to grow as an educator through LEADR, it took time. Several of the tools, such as GitHub and StoryMapJS, were ones that I had not even heard of before. In the beginning, I was really hard on myself, and was met with a lot of frustrated students throughout some classes. It was difficult, but I learned how to be patient with both students and myself. I had to learn how to say, "I don't know, let's figure it out together!" Looking back, I am thankful that I was able to grow comfortable enough to do that. Not only was I able to be honest with the students, but I was able to show students that it was alright to not know everything immediately, I could model productive failure and reframe the ideas around "failure" in a safe space, and I could teach students how to search for the answers themselves. This is a practice that I still use in my teaching today.

Since completing my time at LEADR, I have had the opportunity to be a teaching assistant in the Division of Human Anatomy. I have been able to work with a lot of students from various academic levels, ranging from freshmen to medical students. The capacity in which I work with students ranges widely - some courses are taught in the classroom with anatomical models, some in the anatomy lab with cadavers, and some in the prosection lab with cadavers. In each course that I assist with, I try to make sure students feel like they can approach me with any type of questions that they have. When students do approach me, I try to work through the question with them rather than just answering the question. This is a skill that I have had to work on developing, and was able to learn more through asking questions and watching the anatomy professors around me. Since trying to incorporate this more into my teaching, I have found that students who work through the question often are able to recall the information again later. As several of these students are interested in working in healthcare, it is important that they are able to connect the pieces between clinical examples and the anatomy they are learning. Thus, my goal is for students to truly understand and apply the information that they are given and tested on, rather than have them just regurgitate the information. It is also an incredible moment to see the spark of understanding when students comes to the correct answer on their own!

What I have learned is that you never truly stop learning, especially when it comes to learning how to teach. While there are overall best practices in teaching, like making course materials color-blind accessible, each student that you interact with will have their own needs that may need to be addressed in particular ways. You can learn new and improve methods through workshops and research articles, but sometimes the best way to learn is to talk to students about their needs and keep an open mind in the classroom.