

# Teaching and Supervision Philosophy |

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Teaching at the university has been an important part of my academic work for the past five years. Over the course of my doctoral work, I repeatedly sought out opportunities for teaching at the Universities of Bremen, Vienna, and at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, since teaching constitutes my *raison d'être* for pursuing an academic career. The position I currently have in Frankfurt has a strong focus on teaching, and I enjoy spending time with students in class and my motivation is rooted in seeing young people grow intellectually. Even prior to being a university lecturer, I was involved in the field of extracurricular youth education and had formative experiences in dealing with heterogeneous groups, as I worked with schoolchildren of different religious and ethnic backgrounds.

## My role as a university lecturer |

I understand my primary role as a university teacher to both challenge and encourage my students. I see my responsibility in helping them grow personally and intellectually to become better thinkers and conscientious citizens. To achieve this goal I teach my classes in a manner in which the students come to better understand the relevance of the topics we discuss not only for academic purposes, but also for their everyday lives and societal encounters. For example, I have taught several courses on various facets of forced migration to date. In all of these courses, it has always been important to me that students not only understand the academic perspective we are discussing in class, but that the material we covered also had an imminent political relevance. I thus emphasized the applicability and relevance of issues we studied in class.

In terms of my pedagogical strategy, I try to 'meet' students at their level. As a result I insist that they send me the materials they plan on presenting before students conduct classroom presentations to their peers. The same applies for term papers. When I meet with them, I am thus able to try to push them 'to the next level' intellectually, and at the same time, they feel more comfortable presenting in class. This method has proven that presentations tend to be both of higher quality and more informative for their peers. Challenging them to think through key issues pushes them to consider objections to their arguments and to defend the point they are trying to make more forcefully. Working with non-native speakers has also been an important aspect of my teaching. Ideas are only as good as they are communicated, and so I have offered to help these students to improve their writing. Similarly, I have paid particular attention that my students feel comfortable in class, with myself having undergone intensive teacher training including seminars on Critical Whiteness and Diversity.

Finally, I am convinced that teaching and research are mutually reinforcing. It is always my goal to illustrate to students that science is not stationary; rather, it is an active process. By including my own research in discussion with students or in class on occasion, students can thus learn how I as a researcher am challenging my field and contributing new insights to long established paradigms. At the same time, explaining my research to students has also led me to discover ways in which my own thinking and writing can be improved or made more clear.

## Teaching and diversity |

Doing diversity in the classroom implies being open towards other perspectives and opinions, and I understand the diversity students bring to my classes as a resource, strength and benefit for all class participants. It has always been my intention to bring material and activities to class that are respectful of the students' diversity and their differences, being aware of intersectional dimensions, too. This has implied, for example, that I have intentionally introduced authors and their work who do not necessarily belong to the common canon, as well as making sure that scholarship of male\* and female\* authors are balanced. None of this happens without conscious effort and my own study abroad experience in Hawai'i, where I shared the classroom with native students, helped me to reflect on who dominates discussions in class, whose knowledge is valued, and I learned what it meant to study in a diversity and culturally-sensitive environment. It is thus part of my teaching to constantly reflect on the choices I make: How can I make sure that certain students do not dominate the discussion? How can I encourage all kinds of students to participate in class? Did the content of my class thoughtlessly reproduce the standard, normalised understandings of knowledge, or did I manage to introduce students to a diversity of opinions and accounts? Furthermore, I understand diversity as taking into account individual students' very

personal circumstances. Following one class, I had a young female student approach me who told me about her family situation – namely that she had assumed care of her mother who required extensive attention due to a severe illness. We discussed together how she would still be able to complete the class. Individuals' perspectives on questions of care provision – a topic covered in the class – are especially relevant when they have personal experiences with these matters. Diversity-sensitive teaching thus does not imply merely enforcing the syllabus at all costs. For me, 'diversity in practice' also means doing my part to enable students who are confronted by specific challenges – irrespective of whether they are due to individual or socio-structural circumstances – to be the best scholars and citizens they can be.

### **My role as a supervisor |**

I am aware of the responsibilities I have for my students as a supervisor of their academic progress, including the supervisory role I have in supporting them with their BA and MA theses – and, in the future, of doctoral candidates. Mutually understood expectations and obligations are an integral part of successful and productive academic relationships and supervision. This implies that I convey to students what kind of support they can expect from me; in turn, since I am also investing my own time and energy, I also expect from students that they are deliberate about making progress. As a supervisor, I know that I am students' first point of academic contact if problems arise with their project, and I strive continuously to create an atmosphere that makes them feel comfortable to approach me with their problems and challenges. A particularly important part of my role as a supervisor is that I encourage students – and make them aware – of opportunities for further academic qualification and support. This might entail recommending summer schools, methods workshops, scholarships or other funding opportunities. I have much experience in writing letters of recommendation for students for these types of opportunities, even if they do not end up writing their thesis under my guidance.

In terms of supervision of students' work, I believe it is important to provide continual feedback on their writing progress. This includes reading drafts to discuss their work. During my dissertation, I benefitted significantly from my advisor's willingness to engage my work, and also from her initiative to organize colloquia for students to discuss their work. As this had an impact on my own development (and as it improved my dissertation!), I have created a similar kind of network and opportunity for students in the final stages of their MA degree "Science & Technology Studies" at the University of Frankfurt. This combination of both one-on-one feedback by me as well as support by their fellow students has played an important role in bringing projects to a close.

Yet support is not restricted to final projects of one's degree program. I encourage students to seek me out and make myself available to them to discuss their planned trajectories. In the past, this has entailed discussing avenues of potential interest for them – both inside and outside of academia. For example, I have discussed opportunities and career trajectories in social work, in non-governmental organizations, and in business and consulting settings. Similarly, for those who have an interest in pursuing academic careers, I seek to make students aware of the "rules of the game" as early as possible. This entails communicating to them the importance of publishing, and trying to involve and support students in research as early as possible. As a co-founder of the Bremen research group "Forced Migration and Asylum: Transnationally and Intersectionally" (Springer), we included student voices in our volume. Instead of exclusively asking experienced scholars to write a contribution to the anthology, we decided to foster and promote greater permeability within academic hierarchies by including student voices who received much support to bring their work up to an academically defensible standard. As a result, B.A. and M.A. students also had the opportunity to contribute to the volume. I regarded my role in this project as further empowering and supporting students to write their contributions, and I find this work mutually enriching and rewarding.

### **What is good academic teaching and supervision to me? |**

In conclusion, it is my goal to make students understand that the material we discuss is complex, that it has real world implications, and consequently, an impact on their lives. I am concerned with establishing a learning environment in which students feel safe and confident and are thus willing to share their thoughts and experiences. To me, teaching and supervision means taking on responsibility for young people, advising them and sharing my knowledge and experiences; but it also means learning together and benefiting from each other, too.