

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

*[I]t matters, how we assemble things, how we put things together. Our archives are assembled out of encounters, taking form as a memory trace of where we have been.<sup>1</sup>*

Utopias are ostensibly about imagined or speculative futures, but they also serve as a critique of our own world and generate critical thinking about and alternatives to the present. As Ruth Levitas claims, “Utopia also entails refusal, the refusal to accept that what is given is enough. It embodies the refusal to accept that living beyond the present is delusional, the refusal to take at face value current judgements of the good or claims that there is no alternative.” My pedagogy, like my scholarship, participates in this utopian refusal. I welcome the competing priorities of preparing students academically to succeed in the world the way it is and providing them with opportunities to develop a critical stance towards this same world in the hope of one day changing it. Like utopia, pedagogy is intentional and dynamic, not a blueprint for perfection or the way to operationalize existing content. For me, both utopia and pedagogy are generative, living, breathing, value-laden, at times messy and fraught, and always in need of tending, reflection, revision. Like “love,” pedagogy “doesn’t just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new.”<sup>2</sup> I have spent the past twelve years making and remaking my pedagogy, my classrooms, and my praxis. My extensive lived experience at CUNY along with my brief time teaching composition at a private orthodox Jewish women’s college have left me highly attuned to the specific contexts in which reading, writing, thinking, and knowledge production take place. Through these encounters I have developed into a passionate, dedicated scholar-teacher, creating a productive feedback loop among my teaching, research, service, and personal values.

My teaching methods aim to mentor students, to borrow a phrase from critical educator Paulo Freire’s, in “reading the world and the word.” In my pedagogy, everything is a text: our emotions, buildings, literature, political discourse. One of my primary objectives is to help students challenge the uninterrogated beliefs and assumptions they bring to their academic experiences. To do this, I offer alternative perspectives, encourage creative and critical thinking, and facilitate connections among course content, their majors, lives, and larger socio-political issues. I design my syllabi, choose texts, sequence and scaffold assignments, and integrate technology in ways that effectively create the conditions for a community of learners who have a deep understanding of (and appreciation for) the writing process. To foster metacognition, I have my students routinely compose reflective pieces that critically comment on their composing and revising processes (“writing about writing”), an approach that values writing as recursive rather than as an exchange of written work for a grade or degree.

My expertise in digital pedagogy and digital writing extends this work by helping students develop fluency in digital literacies, multimodal composition, and networked, public writing. By posting frequently on our course blog, students have the opportunity to experiment with ideas and language in a low-stakes environment, experience a public audience, and contribute to a semester-long peer-to-peer conversation. I then bring these homework assignments into the classroom as course content, bridging virtual and face-to-face activities and workshopping them to create a shared understanding of the elements of successful writing. In this way, I introduce key strategies such as brainstorming, freewriting, revision, and peer review early in the semester so that when we approach more extensive, formal assignments, students are already attuned to drafting, scaffolding, and revision. I design my course websites and teach my student to design their ePortfolios as reflective, dialogic learning environments for collaboration and student-generated content, and work with them to build professional online presences as they transition to their careers post-graduation. I integrate instructional technology not to,

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press, 2010. 19.

<sup>2</sup> LeGuin, Ursula K. *The Lathe of Heaven*.

in Craig Stroupe's words, "simply appropriat[e] digital space for writing's business as usual," but to create new possibilities for teaching, learning, and composing through its affordances. My pedagogy, not the technology, guides my praxis. Like Randy Bass, I believe that "new technologies and new learning environments provide an *opportunity* for intentionality" and "[i]f we want students to learn better or differently, then we have to teach differently." I carry this belief into my work as Co-Director of the OpenLab, City Tech's open-source digital platform for teaching, learning, and collaboration. In this capacity, I mentor a student blogging team and lead college-wide faculty pedagogy development, becoming a recognized and respected pedagogical leader on campus.

My research in utopian studies, happiness studies, and positive education is also linked to my commitment to effective pedagogy, student engagement, and sensitivity to the emotional components of academic writing. One example is a learning community I designed with a Human Services professor centered on well-being. My first-year writing course is structured around a class "happiness archive," where students blog about happiness in their worlds and analyze, in Sara Ahmed's words, "not only what makes happiness good but how happiness participates in making things good." The project's aim is building from personal narratives of happiness to engagement with institutionalized well-being, and helping students transition from passive consumers of information to informed participants in the important, ongoing public debate about well-being. This project builds on the various literacies a diverse student body brings to the academy and culminates in a collaborative, researched, service learning assignment on physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being in higher education.<sup>3</sup> I engaged in further interdisciplinary collaboration as a faculty fellow on an NEH grant bridging the humanities and STEM. I designed and taught a module focused on rhetoric and well-being in an upper-level Urban Design course for architectural technology majors. In this module, I incorporated seminar discussion of readings relating to governments assessing and prioritizing residents' happiness in urban planning (e.g., Charles Montgomery book, *Happy Cities*); students' individual and collaborative blogging reflections; a class visit to a Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibit on megacities, inequality, and speculative design; and group presentations of student proposals for revitalizing an abandoned neighborhood on the Brooklyn waterfront. As students developed a broader socio-cultural and rhetorical understanding of their technical major, they shifted from viewing their work as mere infrastructure for others to understanding buildings and spaces as ideologically-inflected. I also strive to make power dynamics visible in my Science Fiction courses, in which I explicitly connect writing, utopia, critical consciousness, and social justice. For example, during the recent presidential election, I designed low-stakes assignments to analyze the utopian rhetoric politicians use to persuade voters to buy into their vision of progress for our country and how to achieve it. Politicians traffic heavily in "what if?," extrapolation, and world-building, central features of science fiction. This extrapolation is grounded in competing needs, desires, and visions about how people should live and how societies should be structured. Together, my students and I critically interrogate the performative work of political rhetoric in defining horizons of possibility.

The spirit of utopia resides in the space between the way things *are* and the way they *ought* to be. My pedagogy also lives in this space. I ensure that students are well-versed in academic competencies and learn transferrable, marketable skills, yet I also leverage the gap between *is* and *ought* to hone students' critical thinking and creative problem-solving; build community and empathy; encourage experimentation, risk-taking, and comfort with failure; and inspire them to compose meaningfully, in whatever way is available to them. For me, imagining and desiring otherwise, practices at the heart of utopianism, are rhetorical, pedagogical, and radical acts, rooted in the belief that the world can be remade for the better and arguing for, designing, and enacting this vision of the good life.

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<sup>3</sup> My experiences designing and teaching this learning community were presented at CCCC, and informed the arguments in my *Composition Forum* article on writing and well-being: <http://compositionforum.com/issue/34/why-well-being.php>