

TEACHING STATEMENT

ELIZABETH A. HOLDSWORTH

My goal as a teacher is to guide students in building broadly applicable skills in anthropology including critical thinking, reflective learning, project development, and communication while creating space to think deeply about novel topics and perspectives. In my courses, teaching is the cultivation of an environment in which students can be active and self-directed participants in their own learning. Creating this learning environment is also central to my goal of encouraging inclusivity and supporting diversity of students' identities and experiences, described in further detail in my diversity, inclusion, and equity statement. As a biocultural anthropologist, it is important to give students practice in applying evolutionary and cultural anthropological theoretical frameworks and methodology to understand how human biology is shaped by culture and how culture is influenced by biology.

One of my teaching goals is the development of self-driven learning skills. I assign summative course projects that permit more student agency in their creation. In Migration and Human Biology, I recently transitioned to an "ungraded" model of the class. I decided to use this format to allow for more student-guided learning, emphasis on skill development, and to permit students to feel more comfortable in experimenting with new ideas and approaches. In this course, students completed self-reflective learning journals each week, charting their learning goals and their ability to meet those goals and identify what they needed to do next week to improve their skills and understanding. Throughout the semester, students grew significantly in their ability to describe and chart their own learning and skill-development. Students also grew significantly in their ability to read, understand, and explore complex scientific literature. This past spring was the first time I used this "ungraded" approach. Despite some initial hesitations, students were very pleased with the course at the end, explaining that they felt like they had more agency in the course and that the course was indeed primarily emphasizing their engagement with scientific ideas and literature, rather than memorizing particular information.

In this course, I also assign an "unessay"—a final project of any format that incorporates course material or theoretical approaches on a topic the student chooses. This allows students to direct their own learning, use some of their creative interests, and produce a tangible product they can include in professional portfolios. Students produced research essays, family migration narratives, and "In My Life" videos that detail how migration to new environments would affect the fictional narrator's biology. These projects demonstrated students' abilities to connect course material to novel and relevant topics of their own interest.

My assignments and classroom interactions allow students to practice critical thinking. In Anatomy and Physiology labs, students frequently ask for clarification on anatomical terminology. I ask a series of questions about the linguistic meaning of each part of the word, leading them to a conclusion of the meaning and then ask them to conclude the function this likely has, based on the term. This helped them recall previous information and practiced how they would reason through a similar, novel question in the future. At the end of the course, students commented that while not receiving an immediate answer was initially frustrating, they learned the material better and could understand new terminology when they encountered it. In Growth and Development, I use prompts in discussion boards asking students

TEACHING STATEMENT

ELIZABETH A. HOLDSWORTH

to apply the course material to new questions. Students demonstrated a detailed and complex understanding of growth, for example, when they answered why short stature relates to productivity and longevity, by applying theories such as Developmental Origins of Health and Disease.

As a biocultural anthropologist, one of the learning goals in my classes is for students to apply evolutionary and cultural theories to understand human biology. I move through topics that describe human biological variation, the evolutionary causes of variation, and the sociocultural factors that create the circumstances of this variation. In *Migration and Human Biology*, we move from discussing how migration studies reveal human plasticity to the influence of migration on gene flow to multiple other intersections of biology and migration and end the course with de Leon's *The Land of Open Graves* to discuss how social and political economic factors shape human migration.

In higher education, students must have low-risk opportunities to try new approaches and new perspectives. I aim to create a space where students can be innovative, creative, and learn from failures without being penalized for innovative attempts. I structure my courses around questions, lead students through the anthropological tools to answer these questions, and create assignments for students to answer these questions in creative and innovative ways, drawing on their knowledge and skills. The purpose of education is to create lifelong learners and community members with deep critical-thinking skills, holistic knowledge, and a breadth of expressive approaches. My approach to teaching is centered around these goals; creating courses, educational spaces, and assignments that allow students to think about and explain complex biocultural anthropological questions using a range of methods and perspectives.