

## **Teaching Mission Statement for School of Justice and Social Inquiry**

The academic mission of the School of Justice and Social Inquiry is to improve the quality of thinking about justice. All of our activities -- scholarly research, teaching, and service -- support this mission. These activities bear an intimate relation to each other. Research and service are forms of teaching, broadly defined. Our success as an academic endeavor depends on maintaining a close connection between the forms of teaching and learning in which we engage.

Teaching about justice requires an interdisciplinary approach. The scope of concern is necessarily global. Both humanistic and social-science approaches are valuable, especially in integrative combination. Successful teaching about justice requires diversity in outlook and background in the faculty and in the student body. The approach must be change-oriented and linked to the pressing justice concerns of our time.

Critical inquiry is at the heart of our teaching mission. We seek to develop skills in critical reading, thinking, and problem solving, and to assist students in effectively presenting their ideas orally and in writing. All of our courses should provide for mastery of core concepts and an interdisciplinary learning experience, drawing upon history, the social sciences, philosophy, legal studies and other fields as appropriate.

Good teachers are patient with students, finding ways to convey complex matters effectively, and helping them achieve their intellectual goals. Developing student enthusiasm for the subject is an essential part of good teaching. Teachers create enthusiasm by keeping abreast of knowledge in their fields of expertise and by finding creative ways to engage students with these ideas, including active learning. It is helpful to design interesting and current syllabi, include a variety of learning methods in courses, and to introduce students to relevant community resources around them. Students who become intrigued by justice will incorporate their learning into their lives and begin teaching themselves. They will make better decisions and become better citizens.

Teaching is a complex process, often taking place over long periods of time, occurring in many venues, and proceeding by various methodologies. Teaching draws on personal qualities and expertise that vary among individuals. Although all systems of evaluation have significant weaknesses, it is nevertheless important to find some credible means of evaluating and improving performance. Student learning must be assessed, and so must faculty efforts. The quality of the overall curriculum should also be assessed and continually improved.

Successful teaching also requires fair methods for assessing student learning, protection of the learning environment, and self-discipline. Tests should be fair and frequent enough to assist in the learning process; faculty should be available through office hours and willing to communicate out of class; grades received should be a good measure of student performance and grade inflation should be avoided; cheating and plagiarism must be addressed and dealt with effectively. Teachers must take whatever steps are necessary to preserve a challenging and open learning environment, including admonishing, disciplining, or dismissing students who fail to show respect for the learning process. The University has the responsibility to back up teachers in these situations.

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The School of Justice and Social Inquiry has the responsibility to design fair methods of evaluating its faculty. Performance should be assessed in terms of effectiveness in promoting student learning and willingness to mentor students. Student evaluations, for example, should focus on the instructor's overall teaching ability, accessibility, and the rigor of the course, including the presence of core concepts and central ideas, opportunities for critical thinking and writing, intellectual challenges presented. Ideally, student evaluations should be done after the course is completed. Preparation of teaching portfolios can be helpful in assessing performance if they focus, not on amount of materials produced or the technologies employed, but on the key questions associated with student learning: Are the learning goals appropriate for the course? Do teaching methods effectively support these goals? Are the means for gauging student performance and student learning informative?

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At the graduate level, the same criteria for effective teaching apply, but instruction is more individualized. Effective graduate teachers help students achieve their academic goals, including especially completion of cumulative project and thesis requirements and professional preparation, including preparation to teach. Part of the teaching mission of the School of Justice & Social Inquiry is to prepare graduate students to assume teaching responsibilities.

At both levels, the School of Justice and Social Inquiry should make every effort to ascertain that teachers take seriously their obligation to mentor students and to be accessible, ethical, respectful, and fair in all dealings with students.