

# Teaching Dossier

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## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My teaching philosophy is centred around creating a safe and motivating environment for students to learn. To do this, I employ three concepts; building safety, motivating students through engaged learning, and valuing feedback. I aim to enact student driven learning in the classroom.

### Building Safety

Being a statistics instructor, I am acutely aware that when students walk into their first statistics lecture, the most common emotion they feel is fear. They are “scared of stats” or “stats is the worst class I will have to take”. This fear can hold them back from learning. My first task as an instructor is to start to work towards putting them at ease and building a trusting and nurturing educational environment. I do this by providing honest facts and expectations about the class, and by using humour. As a nurse, relationship building is paramount to my practice, and this is no different for me when I am in the classroom. This relationship building extends beyond my relationship with the students, and I encourage interactive learning between students. I do this by building mentorship activities into the course such as having students post their questions on the discussion board for their peers to answer and paired assignments between novice and more advanced students. Finally, I use dynamic or live data in my teaching examples, which has me conducting ‘real-time’ statistical analyses with the class, and sometimes results in unexpected outcomes or me making errors. Embracing my mistakes with the students and working through them together provides some of the best learning for them and also models that we are all learners and they are safe to make errors in our class.

### Motivating Students Through Engaged Learning Activities

I believe that engaged learners, who can apply concepts to their own lived experience, will retain information and be able to scaffold their learning with future concepts. I avoid didactic teaching methods to every extent possible; no one likes it when an instructor stands at the front of the room and lectures about topics that are not applicable to their learning or practice environment. When delivering course content, I strive to link learning objectives and outcomes back to tangible applications that students can relate to, or will see in their practice. Often, after delivering a concept, I ask students to reflect on their practice or their research question to determine how this concept could be applied to their situation, allowing time for discussion of their ideas. Finally, I integrate at least one student engaged learning activity into each lecture. These vary between survey development, statistical polling of classmates, or counting candies to highlight statistical concepts.

### Valuing Feedback

My teaching style is dynamic and fluid. I aim to tailor my instructional and class activities towards student-based learning. In order to do this successfully, I often solicit feedback from students and tailor my teaching activities based on their feedback. As I progress in my teaching experience, I aim to become more formalized in asking for feedback. This has moved from a casual request of ‘let me know your thoughts on...’, to ‘this is a new activity, lets take some time now to discuss what you liked and did not like’. I aim also dedicate the beginning of each class to check-in with the students to discuss assignment progress and activities from the previous session.

## TEACHING DOSSIER

Working in the Faculty of Nursing, I teach undergraduate and graduate students who will someday become my future colleagues. These people will be caring for my loved ones, conducting research that may fundamentally change healthcare provision, working alongside of me to enhance health trajectories for some of our most vulnerable citizens, or developing evidence that will alter nursing practice. As such, I invest myself into their learning so that I can contribute to their successes, and prepare them for their failures, which are inevitable in academia. I strive to develop a safe learning environment so that students are able to open themselves to learning the concepts that they need, in order to excel as leaders in the nursing profession.

### Teaching roles

I have been an instructor or a graduate assistant teacher (GAT) with the Faculty of Nursing, in various capacities since 2011. My teaching role has progressed from clinical nursing instructor, supporting undergraduate nursing students to learn the applications of nursing practice, to teaching research methods and statistics in the graduate program. Each time I teach a session, my confidence increases, and I apply more creative techniques to convey course contents and topics. Incorporating new and creative techniques into classroom activities maintains my enthusiasm for teaching and keeps students engaged in the course.

When I started as a sessional instructor for the Faculty of Nursing, I taught the practical component of our community health and family health nursing classes, working with nursing students to develop a community-based intervention in a lower income area in North Calgary. From this experience, I found that my own practice expertise and authenticity were the most successful strategies to build relationships and convey course concepts with the students. As I continued to teach as a practice instructor, I found that as my confidence increased, so did my creativity in the classroom. While some creative lesson plans were not successful, many were embraced by students and enhanced learning outcomes and course applications.

Most recently, I have been a sessional instructor for the Nursing 609: Applied Statistics for Nursing Research graduate class for two semesters. Prior to this, I was the graduate assistant teacher for this class for four semesters. As such, I have been involved with the N609 class, since it was introduced to the Faculty of Nursing in 2014. Throughout this time, I have worked with our teaching team to modify, tailor and improve this class to better meet the needs of our nursing graduate student learners. When I was brought on as the instructor of record for N609 in the Spring of 2019, this was my first experience with planning and executing the content of an entire course. Additionally, due to staffing constraints, I was tasked with teaching double the number of students typically assigned to a cohort. I was provided with an additional instructor to assist with marking and some teaching, but as evidenced by the universal student ratings of instruction (USRI) scores in Table one, there was room for improvement. I carefully considered and addressed student feedback when I taught the course for the second time in the fall of 2019. These improvements in both the course instruction and likely the smaller class size resulted in substantially increased USRI scores.

*Table 1 Teaching history and related universal student ratings of instruction (USRI)*

Class	Semester/Year	Role	Number of Students	USRI Rating
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Nursing 609	Fall 2019	Sessional	9	6.43
Nursing 609	Spring 2019	Sessional	28	5.16*
Nursing 609	Spring 2015 – Fall 2018	GAT	8 – 18 students	n/a
Nursing 289	F2013	Sessional	13	6.08
Nursing 389	W2013	Sessional	16	6.75
Nursing 402	F2011	Sessional	9	6.5

\* Course taught by more than one instructor

### Moving from ‘surviving’ to ‘thriving’

When I first started out as a graduate assistant teacher and as a novice sessional instructor, my only goal was to *survive* the class and to get myself and the students to the end, hopefully covering most of the course content along the way. After delivering the course once and realizing that I could do this, I started to adapt my course content and teaching strategies to better address the needs of the students. The first step in this progression was to change my motivation as an instructor.

As I have progressed as an instructor, I have transitioned my motivations from *delivering course concepts* to *sharing my knowledge*. This transition has in part, been a result of my increased confidence in delivering the course topics, but also as a result of my desire to motivate students through engaged and meaningful learning activities. I have found

*When someone shares their passion and contagious energy, it's hard not to be inspired and interested. Thank you, Merilee! A few times while working on the lab assignments... I've said "this is kind of fun" before the semester, I didn't think I would say that!*

that the students enjoy hearing about my graduate journey (mainly my mistakes) and how I learned from my successes and failures. Sharing this experience creates an environment of safety by demonstrating that failure and mistakes are a natural part of conducting research, and that we all learn from these errors. While I am at the front of the class as an expert, I do not profess to be infallible and I situate myself as a life-long learner as well. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this transition was not being afraid to say “I don’t know”. As a novice instructor, the temptation to “fake it ‘till you make it” is strong, but in my experience, that does not work. I have learned, through mistakes of my own, that if a student presents me with a question or a concern that I cannot answer off the top of my head, I need to say “I don’t know, but I know where we can find out”. This makes me human and accountable to the students. Also, when I do work with them to find out the answer, it demonstrates to them that I am invested in their learning. This was highlighted last semester when I was working through an example of a statistical analysis where we polled the class about their preference for certain food. I was entering the data into our statistical software and I forgot to request a single operation of the software that ended up altering our result. Together as a class, we needed to work backwards to figure out the mistake and why it altered our result. While this was not an anticipated outcome of my lesson plan, it was likely some of the most valuable learning for the students because they needed to apply many previously learned concepts to figure out the error. Being able to admit my error and working with the students to figure it out forced them to apply there learning and also showed them that it is okay to make mistakes.

### Building an environment of inclusiveness and safety

Creating a safe learning space for my students is my paramount concern when starting off the semester. This includes learning student names quickly, soliciting their thoughts and experiences when I present topics, maintaining a climate of respectful discourse, and inviting them to share their lived experiences to invite understanding and compassion from their classmates.

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*I've really enjoyed your teaching, you're so enthusiastic and that made me feel less intimidated about stats (and I was VERY intimidated!). You are so approachable, never made me feel like I didn't know enough, and took the time to really help us understand if we were having issues.*

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My last cohort of students taught me the value of building a community within our class. I set out from the start of this cohort to emphasize inclusiveness and safety in the class room. At the beginning of the semester, all of the students vocalized that they were very nervous about the stats class. As we progressed through the semester, I aimed to enhance relationship

building with the class and students began to participate freely, without fear of judgement. Students knew that it was safe to speak up in class and request that we review a topic that they were unsure of, or to answer a question to which they were not sure of the answer. This safety that we established as a class worked to enhance the learning of each individual in the room. Because they had built relationships with each other, they were patient with each individual's learning pace and were willing to share resources and answers to better navigate the course assignments and concepts. While the journey of learning and the progress was unique for each student, all students made substantial progress in their learning and understanding of course concepts throughout the semester.

Working in the female dominated profession of nursing, I am acutely aware of the barriers placed on women when they are trying to attain education when they have children at home. I strive to maintain a flexible environment where parents will not be precluded from attending class if they are unable to obtain childcare in temporary situations. This past semester, I included a formalized statement in my course outline that provides guidelines to parents about children in class, including welcoming all nursing infants and parents into our classroom (Figure 1). As well, this statement outlines my commitment to students that I am understanding and compassionate about life events happening outside of the classroom and how these may impact classroom performance. Feedback from students regarding this formal policy was very positive and I had many students come up and personally thank me for including it in my course outline.

Finally, I provide my own gender pronouns and am cognizant of using gender neutral language when addressing students in class. It is my goal that all students feel safe and welcome in our classroom, regardless of their sexual identity, ethnic background, parenting

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*I will forever be grateful that I ended up in this class with all of you and flexible and very approachable instructors.*

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or work status. I feel that this goal is successfully enacted as I routinely receive very high scores, including a perfect score last semester for "Students treated respectfully" on the USRIs.

### POLICY ON CHILDREN IN CLASS

Adapted from <https://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/childcare/family-friendly-syllabi-examples>

It is my belief that if we want parents in academia, that we should also expect children to be present in some form. Currently, the university does not have a formal policy on children in the classroom. The policy described here is thus, a reflection of my own beliefs and commitments to student, staff and faculty parents.

- 1) All exclusively breastfeeding babies are welcome in class as often as is necessary to support the breastfeeding relationship. Because not all women can pump sufficient milk, and not all babies will take a bottle reliably, I never want students to feel like they have to choose between feeding their baby and continuing their education. You and your nursing baby are welcome in class anytime.
- 2) For older children and babies, I understand that minor illnesses and unforeseen disruptions in childcare often put parents in the position of having to choose between missing class to stay home with a child and leaving him or her with someone you or the child does not feel comfortable with. While this is not meant to be a long-term childcare solution, occasionally bringing a child to class in order to cover gaps in care is perfectly acceptable.
- 3) I ask that all students work with me to create a welcoming environment that is respectful of all forms of diversity, including diversity in parenting status.
- 4) In all cases where babies and children come to class, I ask that you sit close to the door so that if your little one needs special attention and is disrupting learning for other students, you may step outside until their need has been met. Non-parents in the class, please reserve seats near the door for your parenting classmates.
- 5) Finally, the struggles of balancing school, childcare and often another job are exhausting. I hope that you will feel comfortable disclosing your student-parent status to me. This is the first step in my being able to accommodate any special needs that arise. While I maintain the same high expectations for all student in my classes regardless of parenting status, I am happy to problem solve with you in a way that makes you feel supported as you strive for school-parenting balance. Thank you for the diversity you bring to our classroom!

Figure 1 Policy on children in class from Fall 2019 N609 course outline

### Teaching with enthusiasm and passion

A personal virtue that I bring to anything I do is enthusiasm and passion. When I am enthusiastic about what I am teaching, this comes through in my lessons and instructional activities. Routinely, any feedback that I receive, both in my teaching and in my research activities, enthusiasm is often used as a descriptor. On my most recent USRI ratings, I received perfect scores on “Communicated with Enthusiasm” and this is often one of my highest ranked categories. I feel that if I am enthusiastic about the topic, this will convey interest to the students and gain their attention.

*It is so inspiring to see a professor teach with such energy, excitement, and enthusiasm.*

I also offer humility when I teach. I am a firm believer that we sometimes do our best learning when we make mistakes. Further, working in academia is rife with many failures among the few successes. I am transparent with students about the process of research and how mistakes are reality. I embrace Sylvia Duckworth’s iceberg illusion (Figure 2) in my teaching and practice. I do not want the students to only see

me for my successes and hold an unrealistic view of research or success in academia. By offering humility in my classroom, I bring awareness to the process of success being a culmination of failures, dedication and hard work and allow the students permission to make mistakes of their own. Embracing humility as an instructor further contributes to building a safe learning environment and reduces false expectations that the students may have of themselves.



Figure 2 The Iceberg Illusion - image credit Sylvia Duckworth

#### Classroom activities and teaching strategies

Throughout my lesson planning, I strive to make student activities pragmatic and relatable. As such, I structure assignments so that they will build content and contribute to each student's final masters project or research study. This starts with developing a research question that is directly relatable to their field of study. Students can take the feedback that they receive from this assignment forward as they move through the program to further develop their master's project or research study. Similarly, the midterm assignment is to critically review a self-selected, small body of literature that will inform their master's project or research study.



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*It has given a different way to think about things and I am grateful for your patience and fun activities to help me understand and remember content.*

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My in-class activities are structured around relatable and fun material so as to engage students and remove the stigma that statistics is hard. For example, I use two brands of chocolate chip cookies to apply learning about between group differences (t-tests or comparing means between two groups). Students randomly select one cookie from each bag and then count the chocolate chips in each cookie. We then calculate the mean number of chocolate chips for each brand and run an independent t-test to determine which brand has the most chocolate chips in their cookies. We continue with the chocolate chips cookies to learn about dependent and one-sample t-tests. I also use this strategy to teach analysis of variance (ANOVA) with different M&M varieties and regression with licorice. Using these types of activities engages students and allows them to participate in a mini-research study from start to finish. Feedback from these activities has been very positive and the students also retain the concepts I aim to solidify in my teaching.

#### Thinking outside the box to troubleshoot and problem solve

As a sessional instructor in the undergraduate program I was tasked with addressing missed student time in a very time constrained clinical placement. Students who were sick, could not be present in the clinical setting, yet needed to 'make-up' the time missed in order to adhere to nursing education guidelines. As such, I developed a journal club that was mandatory attendance in lieu of missed clinical days. Students were assigned a journal article addressing a research question relevant to their clinical area and had attend a 1.5-hour session where we reviewed the article using guiding questions. This assignment incorporated clinical education, research and critical analysis into student learning. It also met the requirements of the governing body for nursing education to appropriately address missed clinical time.

In my 2013, community health clinical session, some of the students expressed a desire to learn about global health. Being restricted to community health within the context of Calgary, I was tasked with finding an innovative method to incorporate global health into our clinical group. To address this issue, I introduced a novel study into our weekly clinical meeting days. Each week, the students were to read a chapter and one student facilitated the conversation by developing guiding discussion questions. We related the questions and the content of the book back to the outcomes of the community health course. While not 'real-world' experience, we were able to relate the course concepts of the *Community as Partner* model to the activities and the outcomes of the novel and apply a critical lens on the concept of *White Saviourism*.

#### Invited guest teaching

I have been invited into many classrooms to share my expertise on infant feeding, child development, and mixed methods research. I am routinely invited to speak with the nursing undergraduate students about infant feeding, and my presentation on this topic has evolved dramatically over the past five years. Originally, I taught this content based on a nursing and counselling perspective. I found that when I delivered the content information, some students were very interested, while many others looked bored and disengaged. As such, I dramatically revised my presentation to be front loaded with engagement tactics about why infant feeding was important to their nursing practice. I then provided them with ground breaking, cutting edge evidence about the impact of infant feeding and early life experiences on long-term health and developmental outcomes, relating this back to a multitude of nursing specialties, not just

maternal-child health. I then proceeded to provide them with the desired objectives of the instructor on record about supporting breastfeeding and physiology of human lactation. By engaging learners and relating the lecture topic to something that was meaningful and applicable for them, I was able to increase interest and class participation. The feedback that I have received from students who attended my more recent infant feeding lectures has been very positive and enthusiastic. Additionally, I have had several students contact me after my lectures asking if they can work with in our lab as an undergraduate research assistant.

### Extending beyond the classroom

Often, I have students from previous cohorts contact me for mentorship advice and guidance. I have continued mentoring relationships with at least one student from each cohort for which I have TAd or instructed to assist them with navigating the graduate student environment, apply for funding, or with transferring from the Master of Nursing program to the PhD program. These mentorship relationships have been both formal and informal and have provided me the ability to watch my students grow and develop as they progress through their graduate journey. As a member in our education and research community, I want to ensure that the students we are teaching have continuity and strong mentorship throughout their graduate journey. I provide mentorship and guidance to these students to help them develop into contributing members of our academic and professional community.

Formally, I have mentored and supervised three undergraduate students in various research projects and two masters level students in their masters work (Table 2).

*Table 2: Student Supervision*

<i>Start Date</i>	<i>Student Name</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Project for supervision</i>	<i>Research or Thesis Title</i>	<i>Completion Date</i>
APR 2019	Amy Graham	Master of Public Health	Masters Project	Accessing health information: Implications for healthy parents, healthy children	September 2019
SEP 2017	Samantha Delhenty	Master of Nursing	Masters Thesis	Association between breastfeeding self-efficacy and human milk feeding in mothers of moderate and late preterm infants in a level II NICU	June 2019
NOV 2018	Rachel Dien	Bachelor of Nursing	Markin Undergraduate Student Research Project	The effect of maternal health status on breastmilk feeding in preterm infants	March 2019
MAY 2018	Puneet Punian	Bachelor of Nursing	Research Assistant	Family Research Agenda Initiative Setting Project	Continuing

MAY 2017	Jacqueline Wilson	Bachelor of Nursing/Master of Nursing	Research Assistant	Family Research Agenda Initiative Setting Project	Continuing
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### Reflection on Future Practice

As I move forward in my teaching practice, I choose to further embrace student directed learning. This requires that I ensure I am formally inviting and incorporating student feedback into my teaching practice. I plan on doing this in two ways. First, I will incorporate at 3-2-1 feedback method into my class structure. The 3-2-1 concept asks students to anonymously complete a short questionnaire asking them to list 3 things they learned, 2 things they will do differently, and 1 thing they still have questions about. This activity will provide a safe and structured platform for students to provide feedback. This will not only allow me to assess how students have processed the desired objectives for each class, but will also provide them with a safe platform to provide feedback on my teaching strategies and lesson plans. Second, I will provide weekly 'check-ins' with students by opening each class with a discussion/question and answer period about the current assignment and student perceptions of the course progress. I implemented this with my Fall 2019 class and the conversations were very enlightening for me to understand how the students were perceiving the course load and the assessment techniques. Based on these conversations, I have already started to restructure some of the lesson plans and the midterm assignment for the next offering of this class. I feel that it is important to remain dynamic in my teaching strategies and course objectives to meet the ever-changing needs of our student body.

When I first started out as an instructor in N609, my goal was to simply deliver the course content accurately. Like the students, I too was nervous about the class and ensuring I knew what I needed to know in order to deliver the content. Even after delivering the course one time, I was able to start reflecting on my instruction and the course content to make changes that would better suit the needs of the students. This included tailoring the class activities to better address the needs of the students, significantly changing the course assessments so that we could evaluate the objectives of the course in a more comprehensive manner and finally, altering my teaching style to best meet the needs of the majority of my student learners.

Perhaps my biggest weakness as an instructor is dealing with challenging student situations. I know that if I have a student who is engaged in the classroom, I will invest much time and energy to assist them with their learning. I struggle with students who are not engaged, or who do not want to be present in the classroom. When reflecting on my interactions with students who are in this situation, I realize that I need to become more assertive in holding challenging conversations with them. Previously, I would assume they would review my feedback from course assessments and build on the comments and strategies that I provided to them. Unfortunately, this was not true. I need to identify students who are disengaging from class early and work with them to develop techniques and teaching strategies to better suit their learning needs. I believe that if I approach this from a stance of compassion, rather than defensiveness, I will be able to build a respectful relationship that will work to enhance their learning in the classroom. I appreciate that not all students are interested in statistics and that many are in my class because they have to take the class as a program requirement. However, this does not mean that they have to suffer through the semester, tolerating the information that I feed them. Learning and applying statistics is an

integral component of rigorous research and when taught pragmatically, and with fun learning activities, can be an enjoyable learning experience for all.

While I was a graduate student, I remember having an instructor who would open his PowerPoint presentation at the beginning of class, and the icon would pop-up saying “do you want to pick up where you left

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*“I’m glad we have people who are truly excited about what they teach.”*

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off”...dated from the year before. This indicated to me that he had not reviewed his course materials since he delivered the course the semester previously and was not engaged in our learning. I thought to myself, “I never want to be this instructor”. I aim to keep my course content dynamic, current and contemporaneous. Each time I teach a course, I must engage in my own self-reflection and learning in order to develop a community of learners who are engaged and well-prepared to enter our academic community. I view our students as our future colleagues and research collaborators, so I teach them what I think they need to know in order to succeed in nursing and academia.