

Teaching Philosophy & Research Agenda

Amanda C. La Guardia

As a counselor educator, I endeavor to incorporate key aspects of the counseling philosophy and feminist values when instructing students. I do this as a means to model professional behavior as well as to create a collaborative atmosphere in which students can learn, grow, and excel. Through my instructional style, I attempt to engage students with the material so that they can gain an understanding of the content through their own experiential framework. In order to do this, I take time to get to know the students in the classes I am instructing by taking time to understand their individual professional goals and their reasons for entering the counseling field. With this information, I shape the content of the course to meet the needs of the class.

My role is not only to present material, but to exemplify what it is to be a counselor. I am a collaborator: someone who is willing to encourage students, empower them, and challenge them to meet their unique potential. Within this framework, I also want to provide a safe space for students to explore their own biases, strengths, and areas for growth. I think it is important for students to feel empowered to voice their opinion and enter into respectful, collaborative discussions with their educator(s) and peers, and thus I foster egalitarian learning processes in my classes. Critical thinking essential to learning, as I think it is necessary for practitioners to be able to skeptically review current literature and research with regard to treatment interventions and outcome studies. I believe students should be familiar with the achievements and strengths of our profession as well as the areas in which further inquiry is needed. By understanding the limits of our knowledge, students can develop a sense of creativity and wonder as they find a sense of belonging within the counseling profession, acquire a unique role through which to advocate for the growth of our field and the mental health needs of our communities, and develop initial goals for their career as a professional counselor.

To develop a collaborative learning environment I typically try to draw upon multiple instructional techniques consistent with a feminist/constructivist approach. My philosophy towards teaching is informed by such scholars and theorists as bell hooks (teaching to transgress), John Dewey, and applications of constructivist teaching as developed by Brooks and Brooks (1993). Students are urged to become active participants in their own learning process and to apply their newly formed knowledge to activities and scholarship outside of the classroom. Issues of intersectionality related to cultural experience, bias, and counseling content material are frequently discussed and highlighted. Group work and discussion, experiential

activities, and some student-centered teacher facilitated discussions are employed to help involve students in the material.

Different forms of educational media and technological tools are frequently integrated into my teaching methodology. Students are expected to reflect on their own process in relation to their learning and integrate awareness and theory into their future practice as professional counselors. In-class activities and course assignments are geared towards academic expectations and the developmental level of the students. I strive to create a learning environment in which students can explore themselves and begin to conceptually as well as practically integrate their newfound professional identity as counselors. As students learn and grow, I leave reflective space for myself to learn from every classroom experience and to develop as an educator through my interactions with each student. I am an instructor who is willing to recognize and admit the limits of my knowledge and thus I enjoy engaging in mutual opportunities for growth with my students.

My openness to learning from my experiences with students also informs the way in which I go about research. I currently co-facilitate a departmental research team in an attempt to engage students in the process of professional inquiry. I work with students regularly to develop their own research interests and provide opportunities for them to gain experience with the process (development, data collection, presentation, publication) by assisting me with projects of interest to them. I rarely work on research in isolation, preferring the depth of thought and creativity that develops through collaborative efforts.

My research agenda is systemic in nature. My work is clinically focused, which includes a focus on the need for collaborative community care for mental health treatment and a focus on the importance of counselor professional identity development. I think all of these areas tie together in that clients cannot receive the care they need if counselors do not understand their unique role within the mental health professions. If counselors fail to recognize their unique contribution and perspective with regard to the needs of clients and mental health (wellness), they may not be able to properly collaborate with other mental health professionals and thus may fail to advocate appropriately for clients and our profession. Advocacy and a strong sense of professional self-efficacy is particularly important when working with clients who are experiencing extreme forms of individual and family distress, which occur in crisis situations, as a result of traumatic experience, or when individuals and families are struggling to cope/engaging in self-destructive coping strategies such as non-suicidal self-injury and substance abuse. Thus my research agenda focuses on issues pertaining to crisis and trauma with regard to adolescent development and family functioning, collaborative care, and the development of professional identity to facilitate a strong sense of professional self-efficacy to ensure the continued growth of our field.