Karla M. Hunter Teaching Philosophy

**Teaching Philosophy:** I resonate with a number of ancient Hebrew words pertinent to teaching: *Alaph, Zahar,* and *Lamad*. Translated, they are befriend, enlighten, and learn—words that reflect my student-centered approach. The foundation of my teaching philosophy lies in my belief that inspiring students to build lifelong competencies, a love of learning, and meaningful applications of their skills starts with a firm resolve to making individual connections with them as people, whether face-to-face or online.

**Teaching Methods:** The connections central to my teaching philosophy are bolstered by my commitment to ground my teaching in four principles of evidence-based best practices. The success of these practices has resulted in a number of invitations to share my experiences with fellow faculty nationally and internationally.

*1) Instructor immediacy/presence.*Both face-to-face and online, I employ strategies to decrease the psychological distance between my students and me. Grading major assignments viarubrics in SDSU’s online learning system (Desire to Learn or “D2L”), for instance, allows me to give deep student feedback relatively quickly, allowing me to connect personally with each student through an individualized letter or audio-recording in their Dropbox feedback. Due to strong, positive student responses, I was invited by SDSU’s Instructional Design Services (IDS) to share this method of student engagement in “Optimal Connection Speed: Enhancing Online Instructor Immediacy,” a training for faculty members from across disciplines who are currently working toward their IDS Online Instructor Certification. Online immediacy is also the theme of my portion of a November 2019 multi-institutional team presentation titled “Surviving and Thriving Teaching Communication Online,” a National Communication Association (NCA) pre-conference workshop.

*2) Course Community.* When invited to share my tips for online course community building in SDSU’s IDS newsletter, I asserted, “Assigning students to small, collaborative discussion groups throughout the semester can help. Students report being surprised that they can interact so much in an online course and that their discussions enhance their experiences in the class.”

*3) Focus on Active Learning.* In addition to engaging students through helping them see resonance between course constructs and their own personal and professional lives, I work to connect with them through active learning experiences. One of my favorite methods involves employing forms of digital media many students enjoy already, as in the following assignments and course activities:

* A *Pinterest©* activity to harness students’ interests and affinity for social media as they gather various materials for communication analysis and critique,
* An outlining tutorial analyzing the main points, sub-points, and source material in an episode of “Ancient Aliens*©*,” and
* A literature review activity that engages students in topically-organizing and synthesizing quotations from online reviews of a business such as those on *Yelp©*.

*4) Course clarity.* I enjoy regular course reviews. This feedback from my peers, IDS, and SDSU’s Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL) has strengthened my clarity in myriad ways, including reinforcing comprehension for a diverse array of learning styles by creating and harnessing a growing toolkit of online enhancements [e.g., Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) sheets peppered with humor to help bolster students’ attention and recall of assignment details; and a *YouTube©* video tutorial I recorded to demonstrate tips for enhancing college-level reading skills—a tool CETL requested permission to share with my fellow instructors].

**Impacts:** My passion for fostering student success enhances my impact as a teacher both in and outside of my own classrooms through my consistent commitment to mentoring other teachers within the School of Communication and Journalism (COJO), at SDSU, and beyond. This passion is evidenced by the invited and peer-reviewed scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) presentations and scholarly journal articles listed in the research section of this document. Below are some of the most recent examples of scholarly activity that allows me to collaborate with and mentor other educators concerning topics of great need and interest to our discipline:

* I was invited to co-chair and help craft, present, and assess the previously-referenced November 2019 NCA Pre-Conference titled “Surviving and Thriving Teaching Communication Online.” All 30 spaces were sold out two months before the convention.
* At the suggestion of nationally-renowned Instructional Communication scholar and member of NCA’s Teaching and Learning Council (TLC) Cheri Simonds, I was invited to collaborate on a 2018 short course on classroom civility at our national convention. The course resulted in a 2019 peer-reviewed publication titled “Best Practices for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues in the Basic Communication Course,” as well as an invitation from SDSU’s Basic Communication Course Director to provide a training on this topic for COJO Graduate Teaching Assistants in Fall 2019.
* The *Pinterest*© article referenced earlier resulted from a 2018 email invitation I received from Vinita Agarwal, another member of NCA's Teaching and Learning Council. Her email stated, “Based on your work on innovative ways of engaging learners, I wanted to extend an invitation to you to contribute a short white paper on a specific instructional technology.” This article now appears on the NCA website as part of their “e-Tools Essay Series.”
* As a result of the notoriety and impact of our previous SOTL and assessment work, my colleague Dr. Joshua Westwick and I were invited to serve on a multi-institutional, national assessment team for the Basic/Foundational Communication Course. This work resulted in a 2016 NCA *Advancing the Discipline* Grant, a 2018 NCA panel presentation, a 2019 NCA poster presentation, and the forthcoming peer-reviewed article, “Measuring Essential Learning Outcomes for Public Speaking” in the *Basic Communication Course Annual* (in press).

Perhaps my most rewarding example of teaching impact has been my past six years’ working with Native American students and fellow instructors. This work started when I was invited to design courses that allowed me to teach as well as learn from Tribal College and University (TCU) faculty members while helping them maintain their institutions’ Higher Learning Commission (HLC) credentialing. Since 2016, I have collaborated with faculty and administrators from SDSU as well as North and South Dakota’s TCUs to design and deliver online, multi-student, independent study courses in communication studies. These courses offer faculty/students graduate-level credit for applying communication theory-framed insights to mitigate educational challenges for themselves and for their own students. Resonant with SDSU’s current strategic plan*, Imagine 2023* (Key Performance Indicator #3: [Cultivate and Strengthen Community Engagement](https://www.sdstate.edu/imagine-2023-aspire-discover-achieve/key-performance-indicators#sect2)), this work “Align[s] academic and outreach programming across the university to optimize institutional efforts to support tribal communities and underserved populations.” As a direct result of this outreach, I have been awarded two SDSU *Expanding the Circle* stipends for creating online graduate opportunities, a $9960 grant from the Waterhouse Family Institute, and a $6600 Wokini Challenge Grant. Through these endeavors, I look forward to deepening my connections with SDSU’s *Wokini* initiative, “SDSU’s collaborative and holistic framework to support American Indian student success and Indigenous Nation-building.” My goal in this effort, as in all my teaching, is to advance student growth and my contributions to communication education and across the academy. Through my teaching philosophy, methods, impact, and assessment, I continue to aspire to befriend, enlighten, and learn from my students.