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Teaching Statement for Kirk Award

I remember my first anthropology class for what it showed me outside of what was familiar to me as a college student and for how it lessened my own sense of self-importance. I now realize that part of this fascination was rooted in my own privilege. Though this realization has become a broader conversation within anthropology about where the discipline has been and where it's going, I have embraced anthropology's grapple with self-doubt as part of my teaching philosophy. I take students on a journey in which they not only cultivate new perspectives on the world and the people in it but also do the hard, honest, self-critical work that comes with recognizing the huge responsibility of such an undertaking.

Anthropology should be as much a mirror as it is a window. Students in my classes seek out other models of humanity, other definitions of what's good, decent, and possible, and other notions of self, body, wellbeing, and world-making. In so doing, they come to appreciate the privileges that they have, to identify paths to dismantling those privileges, and to understand how they might be implicated in the suffering of others.

There is no view from nowhere. I want students to be selfless, to decenter their own needs and perspectives, and to take for granted that there are multiple ways of being, behaving, and believing. However, relativism also cannot be an excuse to condone hatred as a "point of view." I want students to recognize when they or someone else is invalidating another person, or when one set of cultural logics is invalidating another set.

Lean into discomfort. I want students to be responsive and adaptable, to seek out critiques from others, to listen, not to be afraid to be wrong, to recognize they may not have all the information, and to appreciate folks as authors of their own experience. I want students to give each other slack and work together to nurture a learning environment in which every student feels supported as they encounter new things and develop their understanding. At the same time, they need to be able to hold each other accountable, and to hold themselves accountable, when they make mistakes after having been taught otherwise. I want students to view others' feedback, even when critical, as a gift, not an indictment.

Each "I don't know" is an opportunity to learn. I want students to see the bravery of saying "I don't know" or "I was wrong," the revelation of holding two or more competing truths simultaneously, and the risks of refusing to do so. Because few problems can be solved well through single-minded or unilateral decision-making, I want to create a space in which no student fears sharing their ideas. As much as possible, classrooms should be spaces of warmth and collaboration. I want students to see the beauty of uncertainty, to recognize that most problems are complicated and do not have neat solutions, but not to let that stifle their ability to act in the world in ways consistent with their aspirations for themselves, their relations with others, and the world.