My teaching philosophy developed as part of my career as a professional social worker. When I first decided to become a social worker, all I knew was that I wanted to help those that were marginalized and oppressed and felt that they did not have a voice. I knew I wanted to contribute to making this country and world a more equitable place for all people. This desire to help evolved as I practiced in the profession of social work for many years and earned a doctorate. When I began my doctoral studies, I was not fully sure how this idea of helping would look but knew that I would expand on my current knowledge and experience to shape the mental health arena to work for everyone. This meant that educating those providing services to individuals who have historically been marginalized and oppressed would become paramount to expanding my idea of help. Now, the idea of help looks like educating the next generation of social workers to provide compassionate, inclusive, humanizing services to the clients served. As an educator, I strive to model and bring those characteristics of compassion, inclusivity, and the human element into the online classroom.

## Philosophy of Teaching

Education is more than a luxury; it is a responsibility that society owes to itself. – Robin Cook

Part of my teaching philosophy is rooted in the above quote.  I believe that education is the tool that can be used for all individuals to foster growth, personal development, and acquisition of knowledge for any pursuit.  I believe that each person should be afforded the right to an education that is tailored to their needs and that will help them to achieve their goals and realize their dreams.  As a professor, I have a commitment to each of my students to support them individually in not only learning the course materials but in becoming compassionate and competent social workers that will provide quality service to the unique individuals they will serve.  This will be done through assessing the needs of each student and making myself available to them to address their individual needs.

The other part of my teaching philosophy is grounded in one word – *human*. It was attending the Social Work Distance Education Conference in 2021 that I heard a workshop presenter talk about bringing in human elements to online classrooms and letting students see the human side of their professors. That stuck with me as I thought since I am human and I am a professor, that the human element was already present. However, I was wrong. The workshop presenter talked about using various forms of media from pre-recorded lectures to short announcement videos to funny memes to bring in that human element. It was like a light bulb went off for me. As a social work educator, I am teaching humans how to provide complex services to other humans, and it would only make sense that I would do this by modeling that human connection in how I teach. It was after attending this conference, that I was able to reflect on how I can bring the characteristics mentioned above of compassion, inclusivity, and the human element into the online classroom and model for students how to take what they are learning in the class via textbooks and other reading materials into real world work to engage clients in services from one human being to another. This has fostered my growth and development as a professor.

**Evidence of Growth and Reflective Practice**

When I first started my career as an adjunct professor, I did not know what to expect and really did not have a mentor or anyone guiding me towards the 'how' of being a professor. I had been practicing as a social worker for many years and felt that I could impart that knowledge to students as a professor. As I would come to know through my time here at George Mason University, being a professor is about more than imparting knowledge. Looking back on when I first started as a professor, I do not think I fully embraced bringing all my human self to the online classroom. I had this idea that I had to be perfect, and this left very little room to bring in my human side and fully connect with the students. I did not know about bringing in elements like virtual office hours or pre-recorded lecture videos to connect with and engage students in the learning process and allow them to see the less than perfect human side that would also aide in their learning and connection to the course.

Fast forward to 2020. The world has entered this unknown space of the pandemic where online learning took on a new meaning and virtual spaces became more common place all around us. This was also the time that I began my position as the MSW Online Program Coordinator (my title changed to MSW Online Program Director in 2023) and Term Assistant Professor at GMU. This is the place where I grew as a professor and program director. In my dual role, I was able to connect and engage with students on many different levels. This is where in the online classroom, I was able to be human and acknowledge when I made a mistake or share with students the missteps I made in the profession of social work that helped me to learn and grow as a professional and that the students could learn from as they begin their journey as professional social workers. Sharing stories of my experiences working as a social worker helped to humanize me as a professor and humanize the work that we do as social workers. It also fostered a deeper connection between myself and the students in my online classes.

At the end of each course, I take time to reflect on my interaction with students to determine what I could do differently or better in the next class or semester to foster student growth and development, as well as their connection to me as their instructor, the course, and the course materials.

The quote below from a student in one of my classes that was submitted to the Stearns Center Thank a Teacher Program illustrates how my growth as an instructor has deepened my connection with students leading to not just instructing them but mentoring them as well.

*Words cannot express the gratitude I have for you as a professor at George Mason University, where I have been a student of yours since your SOCW 600-001 class. Dr. King, you are my inspiration, and I hope to be like you when I finish growing in my career. My long-term objective is to become a professor and assist other BIPOC students in becoming excellent future social workers. Thank you for your assistance, Dr. King.*

**Online Student and Learner Engagement**

The themes of compassion, inclusivity, and the human element are embedded in how I

approach engaging students in the online learning environment. These themes can be found in approaches used such as a welcome video during the first module of the course to acclimate students to using Blackboard, the course syllabus, and my expectations as an instructor. These themes are also encompassed in a course announcement posted at the beginning of each module that features a welcome message, highlights for the module, and key reminders for students to successfully complete that module. The human element comes across in using memes to bring in some fun, light-hearted elements to the course to help put students at ease with engaging with the course materials. Bringing in the human element also helps students to connect to me as the instructor further supporting students connecting with the course and me as the instructor, and fully engaging with the course materials.

### Online Teaching Effectiveness and Impact Criterion

*Thanks for all the communication & clarity so far in the course!*
*Appreciate it.*

The above quote is from a student in a course I taught and illustrates my effectiveness in communicating with students in the asynchronous online modality in support of their successfully engaging with and completing the course. When reviewing the student evaluation of teaching reports from the courses I have taught, the students' feedback of feeling like they learned valuable knowledge and skills to begin as professional social workers are themes presented that demonstrate my effectiveness as an instructor and the positive impact on preparing the next generation of social work professionals.

### Professional Development

As a social worker, lifelong learning is an important part of our profession. I have been able to grow as an instructor and display the characteristics of compassion, inclusivity, and the human element through engaging in professional development activities. These activities include attending and presenting at The Innovations in Teaching Conference hosted by the Stearns Center at George Mason University and the Social Work Distance Education Conference where I received practical strategies to improve my teaching and student experience in the courses I have taught. I have also engaged in professional development by presenting at several conferences on best practices in teaching in an asynchronous format and supporting students in multiple teaching modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Presenting at these conferences assisted me in reflecting on my practice as a teacher and look at areas where I could improve and provide a positive student experience in each class I teach.

### Conclusion

In closing, since becoming a professor in 2018, I have grown in how I engage and connect with students in online courses. The themes of compassion, inclusivity, and the human element are infused in my teaching. Using methods such as course announcements, recorded lecture videos, and clearly communicating my expectations as an instructor bring those themes to life in the classroom.