

## Amanda Starling Gould Teaching Statement

I consider the classroom itself to be a living system, one that can model effective strategies and demonstrate artful authorship in a wide variety of forms. My classrooms are designed to be open, multimodal, knowledge-building, knowledge-sharing environments that speak equally to those with differently-abled minds and bodies and those with diverse learning and communicative styles. Following Cathy Davidson who writes “If your *personal* goal is equality in a world where inequality is structural, violent, and pervasive, you can at least start with your classroom as a place in which to model a better way,” I believe rigorous, generous classrooms can nurture equality, experimentation, and professionalism so that students cultivate not only new scholarly practices but also intentional ways of living in a diverse world.

In my classes, we use a range of technologies—from novels and social media to text analysis and hands-on field research—as scholarly tools to directly engage contemporary texts and contexts. We have used Twitter, for instance, to enact role-playing exercises wherein the students adopt the particular historical, gendered, racial, and social identities of characters in novels we read. In trying to imagine inhabiting differently-figured bodies, the students begin conversations about the rhetoric and ethics of representation on social media, the parameters of social justice, the role our individual bodies have on our daily perspectives, and the cultural construction of normalized minds, bodies, and identities. A similar exercise has the students engaging in local environmental action and participating in global digital activism. If learning is an embodied material practice, these simple exercises open the students to new points of contact with the world. Through these classroom assignments, the students humanize, and come to grasp the urgency of, issues that most often seem distant.

As the course format and content allow, I use a makerspace ethos and distribute responsibility for expertise across students. I ask students to bring their individual backgrounds and disciplinary interests to bear on the knowledge we create in class by assigning each to participate in both large-group and small-partnered collaborations. Using a design-based, model-building method to cultivate classroom interaction, I introduce “challenges” each week that call on the students to work together to participate as visionaries in addressing contemporary issues. In my environmental humanities and communications courses, for instance, the students design policy initiatives, social interventions, communications campaigns, poetic prototypes, and even ‘green’ superheroes. These assignments put the students into the role of problem-solving architects which pushes them to put to good use the critical and creative skills we learn throughout the semester. During their design sprints, I hear them discussing human nature, speculative technological futures, accessible design, ethics, media forms and methods, storytelling, and cultural relevance—all topics we cover in class. In application, our topics became vivid and the students connect to them far better than they do through classroom conversation alone.

In my environmentally-oriented courses, the students and I visit the Duke Campus Farm to get our hands dirty in order to better understand food-production, natural ecologies, land-management, and food justice. After a student this term said she feels more comfortable in the city than in nature because she “knows how the city works,” I planned another visit to the farm so that we might learn more about *how things*—including soil nutrient balancing, water regulation, bee pollination, sun power, compost, and crop rotation—*work* there. We’ll be using this visit, too, as the basis of a design exercise that will ask the students to think through current conversations about geoengineering and, on a more speculative level, to map the feasibility of the science fiction notion of terraforming Mars. Inspired by innovative pedagogue Mark Sample, who sees critical making *as* critical thinking, I integrate these types of assignments in order to broaden what counts as scholarly knowledge-production and to facilitate potentially transformative interdisciplinary interactions.

I have more than ten years of formal teaching experience that includes a variety of genres, learning environments, and educational roles. My methods are informed by my early training in languages, my professional background in writing and publishing, my tutelage under a line of interdisciplinary pedagogical mentors and colleagues, and by my own research practices. In my research, I am continually testing new tools and methods that then feed back into my classrooms. Learning to use a communicative tool, whether it be technical, rhetorical, or theoretical, includes learning how to use it with intention, clarity, and purpose. As an instructor, I feel a responsibility to develop these new literacies and evolve my critical practice alongside today’s ever-evolving contexts. My classroom evaluations positively reflect my dedication, with many students saying my classes are their favorite and nearly all reporting a new sense of the various roles media, cultural rhetoric, and social networks play in the construction of their identities and ideals. My environmental students report they are more aware of waste, water, food, pollution, climate justice, and environmental change. My proudest review comes from those students who say they now see the world differently. In 2017, my teaching was awarded a “Duke University Top 5% Award,” granted by the Dean of Academic Affairs for Trinity College of Arts and Sciences, for course evaluations that were in the top five percent of all undergraduate instructors teaching in the Humanities.

In her recent keynote to the National Endowment for the Humanities, Bethany Nowviskie said “the sobering environmental and social challenges of the 21st century—our grand challenges, global challenges—will require a more capacious humanities.” It is this type of ‘capacious’ thinking that motivates my teaching: I try to meet the students in the many diverse spaces where they reside, and I make a point to teach across technologies, both mediated and methodological, so that students who learn differently can be differently engaged. I believe the tools we use in the classroom can be meaningfully molded outside the walls of academia to be put toward making powerful positive change.