Berill Blair Teaching Statement

The complex problems that arise as society grapples with managing resources in times of rapid change, demand critical thinking and solution-oriented approaches. To this end, I employ practices in my teaching that connect concepts and theories with real-world examples, for example, by bringing diverse work experiences from applied projects into case studies in the classroom. Another pedagogical approach I use channels students' independent thinking toward common goals and interdependent solutions, for example, by introducing students to inter- and trans-disciplinary thinking and relationship building via partnerships with practitioners.

In teaching students basic concepts and theories, I have implemented different techniques depending on the size of the class. For example, in a mainly lectures-based undergraduate political economy introductory class with 60+ students, I sometimes added student-led teaching sessions that started class with a small group's 10 minute presentation answering a couple of deeper reflection questions about a concept introduced in the class prior. These were held to prompt students to actively engage with the theories. For a different section of the same class that had only 20 students, I varied lectures with seminar-style round-table discussions prompted by the same targeted questions.

To connect theories with real-world case studies and to allow students to engage what they learn in the classroom to real-world problem contexts, projects and labs work well. For example a group of students of mine compiled a report on, and recommendations for, sustainable housing technologies for the apartment complex het Bentjen' (in Brunssum), another group examined the economic costs and ecological benefits of fiber-to-fiber polyester recycling in the Netherlands for a Dutch client, while other groups generated policy recommendations to reduce black carbon pollution in Arctic marine transportation.

In the classroom role-playing negotiations and gaming can simulate real-world contexts and challenge existing beliefs. I co-run a serious gaming session with sustainable tourism students where they play a board game that simulates the management of tourism, natural resources and trade-off between different conservation models. In another example for a module about nature conservation in ocean and coastal governance, I ask students to assume opposing roles and positions to present conflicting normative values and perspectives on conservation's meaning and impacts. A group of students 'become' subsistence whaling captains in an Alaska village harvesting with the purpose to feed their village, while the other group steps into the shoes of an international NGO protecting marine wildlife. The groups then debate subsistence-based exemptions, quotas versus total ban. Students report that this module had a lasting effect on opening up their perspectives to complexities.

In mentoring students through thesis supervision, I tailor my guidance according to the ambitions of the student with a view toward fostering their own career development. This may take the form of, for example, arranging a relevant internship experience relying on connections through my professional network.

A significant portion of the experience I have in facilitating learning is from workshop settings, with practitioners, scientists and society-at-large. These have taught me valuable lessons about moderating discussions and mutual learning across diverse values, cultures and norms. I have extensive cross-cultural work experience through my engagements with Indigenous communities, working in observance of diverse values, ethical research agreements specific to tribal councils as well as formal pedagogical training in "Native Ways of Knowing". This background enriches my own perspectives, and I try to impress upon students the diversity of cultures in problem contexts.

In sum, my pedagogical strategies are dedicated to teaching the complexities driving political debates in ways that will remain with the student as they take on their own projects and career tasks.