

Kera N. Lovell
Teaching Philosophy Statement

Throughout my courses, I remain committed to engaging students in discussion-driven critical analysis about identity and power. I actively strive to create a classroom in which students can ask questions freely, engage with topics of power and diversity constructively, and build a foundation in core historical narratives, key concepts, and critical theory. My courses are often structured with the process of cyclical iteration as the foundation for improving skills and building knowledge, moving from identifying and comparing arguments at the beginning of the semester to ultimately having students share their own evidence-based arguments as forms of new knowledge production. Four pedagogical principles ground my courses: 1) Putting multiple viewpoints in conversation, 2) Engaging students through play, 3) Centering student production of knowledge, and 4) Moving learning beyond the classroom.

In my research and teaching, I have found that the traditional “add diversity and stir” technique of storytelling does not foster a lasting connection to produce transformational learning. From teaching white middle-class students in the Midwest to non-traditional, working-class students of color in Hawai‘i, I have found that students across diverse backgrounds find it difficult to wrestle with the challenges and privileges of inequality that shape our world. Using creative group exercises, student-centered discussions, and digital teaching and learning, I transform my classroom into a space where students across diverse backgrounds can not only detect layers of injustice and power, but can sit with them to drive their critical thinking. Centering issues of diversity and inequality in my courses has meant embracing my role as a mentor to students seeking a home for their perspectives. Beyond my classroom, many students and scholars like me often find that academia reproduces and constitutes structural inequalities in broader society—marginalizing those with different abilities, bodies, and ideas who feel displaced in their own community. Making change requires starting a conversation in which the marginalized can speak and have their perspectives heard.

As a sharp contrast to textbook-driven courses, I have students analyze subjects from multiple viewpoints to train them to pinpoint differences and similarities in arguments over time and across different contexts. When teaching about WWII-era Honolulu in my American Studies course at the University of Hawai‘i, students not only read historiography on internment, but compare testimonies written by a Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard worker and a war-time prostitute as part of our larger discussion of how racism and militarization fueled different types of physical, economic, social, and geographic regulation. Comparing different arguments and those representations in popular culture becomes a way for students to see multiple perspectives in their own work. Because my courses are writing and discussion-intensive courses, I regularly use activities that encourage student engagement with concepts and materials. Certain group exercises, like writing skits and making maps, require students to apply shared knowledge to create a collaborative project. Other activities requiring student attention to seeing or listening heighten student senses as preparation for in-class primary source analysis. When analyzing the connections between military and environmental tourism in Hawai‘i, students merge these topics by designing their own critical aloha shirts that shed light on the commodification of Hawai‘ian people, culture, and land in Hawaiian history. Playing with visuality and materiality in the classroom, such as having students design fashion inspired by class readings and construct [edible food flags](#) based on their family histories invites students to explore how seemingly non-academic topics like popular culture warrant deeper discussion of power and identity. My shyest students tasked with using food to analyze their own transnational and cross-cultural identities jumped at the opportunity to present their family histories to their peers.

Throughout my courses I offer opportunities for students to take learning beyond our class session to make course material personally and professionally relevant. When advising the final projects of my graduate urban design students at Ball State University, I had students demonstrate evidence of fieldwork, through interviews and secondary source research, to ensure they were accounting for the diverse impacts of their design proposals. In my undergraduate classes, I encourage students to add depth to course material through independent field trips, film screenings, and service learning opportunities. Visits to historic sites, events, and cultural productions, as well as community-driven oral history and digital humanities projects help students make deeper connections to course material while taking responsibility for their own learning and engagement.