

Seven important teachings are the cornerstone of ethics in the Anishinaabe culture:

Compassion, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, and Truth. These are called the Seven Grandfather's Teachings. While they offer guidance on how to live a *mino-bimaadiziwin* (good life), I also firmly believe that they can help offer guidance on how to be an effective and excellent instructor.

I believe that teaching is a two-way exchange between the student and the teacher. By teaching, I learn and discover perspectives offered to me by our students and opportunities for continuous learning. Culturally, education and teaching are important to Anishinaabe people and to mentorship. In my own experience, I did not have any Indigenous teachers until I reached my doctoral program. I am certain that my education would have been shaped very differently in a positive way if I had had an Indigenous mentor. Therefore, I want to give students something my experience lacked: an affirming presence and guide in a space that can seem alien. Though I feel that I will never be an expert, even in my own culture, my interactions with students teach me how to stay humble and listen and learn continually.

## **Inclusive and Compassionate Learning Environment**

I have solo instructed two 500-level research methods classes, was a teaching assistant for two 100-level introduction to social work courses, and had countless guest lecture opportunities for my colleagues. In the classroom, I have been approached by several Native students who exclaim that they are excited to hear topics surrounding Indigeneity and see someone who was Indigenous who has "survived" the academic environment. I believe these are early signs pointing towards the importance of Indigenous voices in the classroom and intergenerational scholar mentorship. In the future, I am excited to hear further feedback and see the long-term impact of these qualities on my teaching style. Ultimately, I aim to be an approachable mentor who will help guide and advocate for students throughout their learning process.

Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has required many instructors to become more flexible and more aware of factors influencing student learning and accessibility. Before every class, I send out a survey that details if students have accessibility needs and requests, pronouns, and names, as well as any other information that they want me to know that impacts learning. This approach has gained positive feedback from students and higher engagement

outcomes. As one student commented in the final evaluation of the last course, I taught: *“Em was very respectful of student time, clear about goals and expectations, and provided a structure that was supportive but flexible if students needed it. It was refreshing to have this course under her tutelage when my other courses were far less organized.”* Compassion, though an Anishinaabe ethic, has also become a cornerstone of my foundation for teaching and mentorship.

### **Decolonizing Pedagogy and the Classroom**

Because Indigenous ways of learning and knowing have been highly marginalized in higher education, I aim to bring these into the classroom to expose students to these methods and decolonization pedagogy. Not only will this introduce important concepts to non-Indigenous students, but will also create a welcoming and affirming atmosphere for Indigenous students to confirm that they do indeed belong in the academy. As one student stated in a final evaluation: *“Em’s lessons were very impactful for me as a student. Her lessons were a deeper dive into two topics that interest me. I really enjoyed these lessons because it was clear that she felt strongly about them and could speak on a much more personal level.”*

By engaging students in conversation with Indigenous community members through bringing in Native American guest lecturers and having students participate in community events and critically engage with different perspectives, I would hope that not only would my students glean theoretical knowledge but also a real-world application for said knowledge. Also, by being an advocate and mentor for Indigenous students and all students, I can introduce them to what decolonized work can look like. By putting these efforts into action, I believe that it will allow non-Indigenous students to be more aware and better allies towards Indigenous communities and also have Indigenous students thriving in the classroom instead of simply trying to survive.