

## Claudia Yaghoobi | Teaching Statement

Literature is challenging, I tell my students at the beginning of the semester, and it is the task of the literary scholar to keep an open mind about the literature of different countries. I challenge students by exposing them to various text-types and teach them flexibility by asking them to question their own assumptions about the Middle East. I help them break away from their stereotypical perceptions and teach them what it means for a notion to be socially constructed.

For example, in my Medieval Persian Sufi Poetry course, students read poems such as ‘Attar’s “Shaykh of San’an,” which lead them to question their stereotypical views of all Islamic countries as oppressive. I ask students to prepare discussion questions, which often focus on the Shaykh’s violation of Islamic laws in society. The discussion leads students to understand that medieval Persian society was egalitarian, which differs from their preconceived notion about Muslim cultures. I ask students to formulate ideas while keeping in mind Sufi elements such as the importance of love. Students question the significance of the Shaykh’s conversion to Christianity, for instance. These questions become the foundation for the day’s discussion, and in small groups students find textual evidence to support their arguments. After this activity and drawing on their exchanges, I pull out the main themes of the poem and write them on the board for further discussion that encompasses larger course themes, violation of the laws of tradition.

To keep students engaged outside the classroom, I create opportunities for them to give multimedia presentations. For each one of my classes, students are required to do research about their chosen text in groups in order to present it to their peers. I also integrate media technologies, such as PowerPoint presentations, short musical excerpts, and film clips. For example, in my Middle Eastern Women Writers course, I show video clips of *Hollywood Harems* to show students the complexity of the concept of living in a Harem seen from a Western perspective as opposed to the lived experience of Middle Eastern women. In upper-level classes such as my Literary Diasporas class, I use blogging as a way to stimulate intellectual conversation about the lives of Middle Eastern exiles in foreign countries and feelings of not belonging. Students are required to respond to their peers’ comments throughout the week while I monitor and facilitate their discussions.

For evaluations, I design assignments that build upon one another so that the final product reflects cumulative learning. For example in my Iranian Cinema class, students are required to submit weekly two-page papers on that week’s director. By the end of the semester, they have ten two-page papers, out of which they are expected to pick three with similar themes and compare the directors’ techniques regarding such themes. For instance, students compare the ways that Bani E’temad represents the notions of women’s oppressions versus their resistances in her films. In their papers, students reflect upon various existing arguments about veiling. The arguments in favor of veiling frequently lead to rupturing their preconceived notion of the veil as a means of oppression.

My pedagogical strategies are dedicated to exposing students to challenging material that forces them to question their own stereotypical views of the world and remains with them long after they leave my classroom.