

Statement of Teaching Philosophy: Kim Lacey

During my years at SVSU, I have taught a wide range of courses in the English department, Honors, and Gender Studies, showcasing my commitment to interdisciplinary studies. As a member of the First Year Writing team and as Co-Chair of the University Writing Committee, my commitment to the importance of writing, both in the classroom and beyond, is strong. One course in particular, ENGL 212 (Topics in Critical Writing), brought SVSU global attention. With the theme “Writing about Oppression on TV: *Orange is the New Black*,” my Winter 2015 sections of ENGL 212 received international attention, most notably leading to a feature in *The Atlantic*. Such attention for a course might seem unwarranted, especially since designed around a television show. However, I used each interview request (and there were many) as an opportunity to discuss the ways I teach writing to think through the complex relationships between race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

My pedagogical approach to this course, and indeed all my courses, is much deeper than simply watching TV. By emphasizing the interaction between “high” and “low” culture, I firmly believe that popular culture can be utilized effectively to develop deep thinking skills within the classroom and in my scholarly pursuits.

There are specific reasons why I insist on the importance of pop culture in my pedagogy and scholarship. For one, I believe that a college education should not be limited to arcane texts (this is not to say that such texts are without merit). Many students no longer have the privilege of attending a university merely for the pursuit of higher knowledge. As one of these students myself, I knew my end goal of an undergraduate education was to find a career and I needed the skills to make me attractive on the job market. These skills, including critical thinking, deep reading, and the ability to interrogate the world around me, are readily taught in English classes. My pedagogical approach has been to teach these skills, yet through the use of more popular and contemporary texts.

The course I mentioned earlier wasn’t all about watching *Orange is the New Black*—the purpose of using this text in the writing classroom was to interrogate the ways intersectionality is represented in our media. Taken together, the characters in the series explore the ways race, class, gender, and sexual orientation interact within the correctional facility. Looking deeper, the prison serves as a microcosm of our current American political landscape. My students unpacked the implications of a story told from a privileged perspective, how the racial tensions in the show mimicked those occurring in our current society, and questioned the complicated gender roles presented in the series. To help my students gain a vocabulary by which to write about these issues, we also used the textbook *Media Messages: What Film, Television, and Popular Music Teach Us about Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Not only did we apply the knowledge from this textbook to *Orange is the New Black*, but we continually looked at various other examples in the media (e.g., *Empire*, Kanye West’s music, Kara Walker’s art installation *A Subtlety*, or *The Marvelous Sugar Baby*, and the prison zine *Tenacious*). Also as a direct result of my course, I have been asked to contribute a chapter to the upcoming book, *Rethinking the Role of Diversity in Higher Education*. My chapter, “Writing about Oppression: Intersectionality and the College Classroom,” examines how I used *Orange is the New Black* to teach a variety of students the challenges of intersectionality through writing.

In the classroom, I will continue to challenge myself and my students by finding effective ways of incorporating popular texts and technology in discussions and assignments. By continuing to present at conferences and making connections with academics across the country, I will always be experimenting with new ideas to the benefit of our students.