

Tamara Cedré  
Diversity Statement

There are times when personal experience keeps us from reaching the mountain top and so we let it go because the weight of it is too heavy. And sometimes the mountain top is difficult to reach with all our resources, so we are just there, collectively grasping, feeling the limitations of knowledge, longing together, yearning for a way to reach that highest point. Even this yearning is a way to know. — bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*

At twenty-six, I returned to college as an adult. The first in my family to go on to higher education, my path back to school was challenging. Access to the hierarchies of academia seemed insurmountable. Being Latina, growing up in racially charged South Florida, and seeing first hand how a lack of opportunities can determine choices, informs my worldview. These experiences have shaped my deep respect for non-traditional students and for students from backgrounds that are not widely represented in universities. Additionally it has shaped the way I think about exchanges of knowledge and how a college community can shape “ways of knowing.” As an educator, I believe there is power in affording learners the resources they need to name their own condition, think for themselves and creatively imagine another world.

At the current institution I teach at, students come from underserved socio- economic backgrounds and are not always prepared for the rigor of college. This lack of reading, writing and thinking skills serves to exclude many people from critical consciousness, as well as excluding them from labor markets and the political process. One way I have employed methods to bridge this achievement gap and give my students a voice in their own learning, is to teach the foundations of research; presenting material from a variety of viewpoints while encouraging them in their own understanding. This could take the form of a hands-on lab that is frontloaded with a competency but, allows the freedom for personal exploration towards a self- guided process. It could take the form of blogging that extends a forum for discussions as we read a text or study a topic within a unit, empowering them to write down their specific questions and address them with their classmates in a dialogue.

Additionally, the references I present deeply reflect my commitment to critical pedagogy that all knowledge is a social trace and should be situated within a historical context. Whether I am teaching a foundations course in photography or an upper division course in photographic criticism, I present art making as cultural production. I value the student’s experiences in this production and lead them to connect how it informs their choices. I push them to see the experiences of others and how it informs theirs.

This analysis and respect for difference is valuable as I teach canons of art history or technical craft. My sensitivity is demonstrated in the ways I bring visibility to differently abled artists or underrepresented movements into my lectures, but it’s also apparent in the ways I teach studio courses—understanding that access to photographic equipment and its uses are determined by higher economies and that its growing democratization is changing perceptions of the medium’s form in all of its outlets.

My commitment to diversity likewise extends to my research as an artist. My current projects problematize documentary practices within photography, while appreciating the camera’s ability to bare witness and closely describe the world. I am particularly interested in mining visual histories that have contributed to the erasure of marginalized communities. My choices to exhibit and give art talks in underserved places like Eastern Avenue in Baltimore, Little Haiti in Miami and Leimert Park in Los Angeles have come by means of creating a community with curators of color who have recognized my work and allied with my vision to break the conventions of institutional hegemony in the arts and extend educational opportunities to a wider audience.

Teaching has afforded me a chance to be a part of a rhizome of art research and practice that is interconnected like a root system; contingent and interdependent for growth. Diverse communities, learning styles and frameworks of knowledge are continually growing my practice. In turn, I hope to foster the growth of my students and community.

From my experience of attending graduate school in the diverse locus of Baltimore to my current teaching experience as an adjunct professor in San Bernardino, I have been privileged to meet difficult terrains of inequality with a hope for the future. I am grateful for the ways I have been able to affect change in my classroom and in the mentoring of individual students, whose stories run the spectrum but, unify in their strive to learn. As I apply for a teaching position at your institution, I am eager to contribute and grow from such a dynamic group of artists and academics.