Cara Shousterman — Teaching Statement

I believe that innovation is the key to successful teaching. The world around us is constantly changing, and no matter what the discipline, every field of research is being moved in different directions. That being said, teachers must never stop being researchers, as it is our own passion for our field of study that drives the interest of our students. It is up to us, as teachers, to maintain an awareness of issues that are of current interest in our field and in the world, so that we can continually bring them into the classroom. This allows us to teach our students about any topic in a way that seems relevant to them and their lives, thus engaging them on a deeper level. When one teaches with passion and conviction in a field of research and combines this with a genuine interest in making knowledge accessible to many, success is inevitable.

I have been a teaching assistant at New York University’s Linguistics department since Fall 2006, and was an instructor for the course Language in Summer 2008. I constantly strive to realize my teaching philosophy in every course, whether it be by bringing state-of-the-art linguistic research into my lectures, using recitations to make connections between ideas learned in class and pop culture, or working with the course professor to construct projects that challenge students in new ways. For example, I developed a class project with Professor Renee Blake for the course African American English II, where students were required to build an academic blog that discussed issues pertaining to African American English and the African American community more generally. When students are empowered to learn through creation, they necessarily learn to synthesize and present information in a meaningful way, which in turn helps them to become better researchers and teachers.

It has also been my experience that when students learn through creation, they tend to seek ways to continue their research so that they may answer some of the bigger questions that arose during the process. At this point, I encourage students to meet this challenge by pursuing their study and turning it into an honors thesis, an independent project, a student conference paper or a grant application (e.g., DURF). I have provided and continue to provide support and training in all of these areas. My goal in providing this instruction is to give students the tools they need to conduct research on their own. When I see an undergraduate student making decisions about how to conduct his or her own research, not just with knowledge and clarity but with real confidence, I feel that I have succeeded as a teacher.