

## **TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

### **Tenure-Track Hopeful, Ph.D.**

Like a child standing on the seashore gingerly extending one toe into the water, I had enrolled in Introductory Psychology during my freshman year merely to sample what the discipline had to offer -- and, of course, to learn a few mind-reading tricks along the way. I hardly expected to be enticed into a career by an impassioned instructor who used artfully-chosen Seinfeld clips to illustrate social psychological principles, a foreign instructor whose witty but sensitive presentation of abnormal psychology guaranteed him the largest course enrollments on campus, and an established researcher who later suggested I undertake an honors research thesis with her. Despite my disappointment that Introductory Psychology did not teach me to read minds, my instructors impressed me with their confidence, clarity, and enthusiasm, their delicate balance of didactic and Socratic teaching methods, their accessibility for a quick follow-up question or lengthy philosophical discussion, their creative use of contemporary culture and current events, and their uncompromising requirements for critical thinking and hard work. These outstanding qualities propelled me towards an academic career and shaped my own teaching philosophy.

As a teacher of psychology, my primary objectives are 1) to communicate fundamental psychological knowledge to students creatively and effectively, 2) to create an environment in which students' inquiring minds and critical thinking skills evaluate the merit of lay and scientific arguments about human nature, 3) to foster students' understanding of and appreciation for psychological research as consumers, participants, and junior investigators, and 4) to facilitate students' ownership of their education by expecting excellence, encouraging individual consultation, and mentoring students who desire deeper engagement in scholarship and research.

#### Making Psychology Memorable

If mine is the first psychology course an undergraduate student takes, I consider it my privilege and responsibility to provide a compelling reason for it not to be the last. Believing that learning happens on several levels including the cognitive and experiential, I employ both oral and written, group and individual modes of teaching to facilitate a rich exchange of ideas. A few ways in which I strive to make psychology memorable to my students are incorporating audiovisual technology into lectures and using salient real-world examples to teach and assess learning. For example, among traditional undergraduates, I have assessed knowledge of psychological disorders by assigning critiques of contemporary films such as "A Beautiful Mind." With older non-traditional undergraduates, on the other hand, I have used the scenario of teaching one's young child to say "please" and "thank you" to demonstrate the principles of operant conditioning.

#### Independent Thinking

I am also dedicated to encouraging students' already inquisitive minds towards greater curiosity by equipping them with skills to think critically about information presented to them in the classroom and beyond. Interactive lectures create a classroom atmosphere that respects the examination of diverse ideas and opinions and in which questioning is

not merely tolerated but encouraged. To achieve this goal, students must be taught to examine the values and assumptions underlying arguments and to challenge notions of 'pop' psychology with scientific evidence. Instructors must move beyond the text and incorporate the most current research findings, present debates and uncertainties in the psychological literature, and foster lively discussions on the application of psychological knowledge to current world events. In classroom and web-based discussions, my students have been consistently rewarded for asking incisive questions, identifying their own biases in opinion, and grounding their arguments in psychological science rather than popular ideas.

### Introduction to Research

In my view, the most valuable contribution I can make to undergraduate education is to introduce my students to psychological research. By grounding lectures in research findings, my teaching style communicates a deep appreciation for research as the lifeblood of any science and as a good way to further our understanding of the human experience. I instruct my students in the scientific method explicitly through lectures and assigned critiques of journal articles and implicitly through the expectation that psychological arguments be supported by scientific evidence. Having benefited greatly from hands-on research as an undergraduate student, I look forward to involving undergraduate students in my research and advising them on original research projects.

### Empowering the Student

I favor a collaborative teaching approach, expecting that my students will be active participants in their education. My students are empowered when I respect them as intelligent contributors to the learning process, establish and maintain expectations for excellent work, show interest in their learning and development by being available for individual consultation and reward them for outstanding work. I also seek to empower my students by fostering their leadership skills. For example, I often assign students to lead a small group discussion on a topic covered in class. In preparation for that discussion, they do additional research on the topic and devise interesting real-world demonstration/application questions under my supervision. Partnering with students in this manner fosters greater ownership of learning and mastery over course material.

Much like sides of a coin, teaching and learning are inseparable -- every teacher is a student and every student a teacher. The classroom presents an irresistible invitation for teachers and students to engage each other in the ever-shifting dance of sharing and evaluating ideas through scholarship and research. Years from now when I reflect on my own teaching career, I hope to have taught as much as I have learned.