

Teaching Philosophy: Dawn G. Blasko

My philosophy of teaching was shaped by my own experience as an adult with two children returning to college to finish my undergraduate degree. College was a path to a job with the financial security to support my family. I attended classes in the day and worked full time at night, but inside the classroom I was being exposed to new ideas and alternative ways of thinking that feed my mind, and rejuvenated my spirit. My undergraduate professors challenged my narrow preconceptions about the world and more importantly challenged the limitations that I had about myself. By graduation, I was transformed into a person who saw education as a way of developing the knowledge and skills that could be applied to improve my life and that of the people in my community. In the process of conducting my honors thesis, I rediscovered my childhood love of science and saw the power of the scientific method in understanding human thought and behavior. However, in graduate school I learned about the publish or perish nature of the academy, and I was told I could not have it both ways. I would have to choose a career that either focused on research or on teaching and service.

At Penn State Behrend, I seemed to find the impossible, an institution that valued teaching and research in equal measure. Service and outreach was much less valued, as it is in most universities, however, my involvement with the University Faculty Senate exposed me to the work of the Penn State UniScope learning community. Based on the work of the Carnegie Foundation report, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate*, by Ernest Boyer, the UniScope model envisioned a University where teaching, research, and service were integrated and valued. I now think of teaching as a form of scholarship with the objective of imparting knowledge and skills to the learner and enlightening them to different ways of thinking. It also includes the application of those skills to identify and solve community problems. In harmony with Penn State's land-grant mission, my goal is to educate engaged citizens and to discover new knowledge that may be applied to helping people live happier and more productive lives in harmony with their environment.

In my courses, I use my knowledge and skills as a cognitive psychologist to help my students learn and remember key information and transition from learning facts to integrating and applying that information. Students learn better in challenging environments and will work hard when they understand the motivation behind challenging activities. I use reading quizzes on Angel to encourage students to read and prepare for class. In class we explore case studies that provide a meaningful context for learning. I strive to provide students with timely and meaningful feedback so that students can improve their performance. In the psychology program at Penn State Behrend students complete a 13-credit core sequences that included statistics, research methods, and advanced methods. We follow the students through the process of creating and carrying out their own research project and presenting at two regional conferences. Students must understand key concepts in ethics, methodology, and data collection and analysis. If they do not perform well on the practicum exam, I meet with them for one-on-one tutoring and re-evaluate them until it is clear they understand the concepts. Students are held accountable for their own performance and given as much support as necessary to master the skills and knowledge. Each student is unique, but in many cases poor performance is rooted in a longstanding lack of self-confidence and when the project is complete they feel pride and a great sense of accomplishment.

I also try to impart a curiosity for the world around us, and an understanding of diverse perspectives. I developed the first undergraduate general education course in cross cultural psychology at Penn State. In this service learning class, students work with immigrants or refugees to the United States, tutor international students, or develop lessons for at risk students in inner-city minority schools. This is not easy for many of our students, who often have had little exposure to other cultures or perspectives, but their reflection essays demonstrate advances in communication and cultural sensitivity.

Education occurs inside and outside the classroom, so I have conducted numerous outreach programs. I have championed the minor in civic and community engagement at Penn State Behrend. I chair the coordinating committee and have co-taught the core course as an overload. I have also supervised many of the field experiences and capstone projects. I mentor 6 to 10 students a year in undergraduate research, working with students throughout the summer and often taking them to national conferences. The Schreyer Honors College provides a wonderful opportunity for Penn State students to challenge themselves and conduct additional research. I have been an honors advisor for many students and been the thesis advisor for nine Schreyer scholars.

I have also been very active in the scholarship of teaching and led a team to develop a multimedia software program to teach observational research that is in use at several colleges. The project received an award from the American Psychology Association's Division 2: Teaching of Psychology. I also work with a faculty member in engineering to assess and improve the spatial visualization of their students and have been part of a multi site NSF project, *Envisions*, to develop and implement a research-based curriculum to enhance spatial cognition in children and adults.