

Statement of Personal Teaching Philosophy

Teaching is the most rewarding aspect of my professional career and forms the core of my identity as a university professor. Without a doubt, I consider the success I have enjoyed in the classroom to be my single greatest contribution to the mission of my campus and the University. Teaching energizes me and I strive to share my love of teaching and of my discipline with my students. If they see that I am enthused, it makes them more likely to be enthused as well. I take it as a given that I need to show them why they should care about learning. I also strongly believe that effective teaching involves a collaborative and synergistic relationship between the students and instructor. I have high expectations for both myself and my students; they push me and in turn, I push them, all in a mutually respectful manner.

I have a number of objectives and desired outcomes that guide my choice of pedagogy. My primary aim is for my students to take ownership of their education. I therefore see my role as one of a mentor and guide. For this reason, much of my teaching takes the form of Socratic questioning. I have found the Socratic method to be particularly beneficial because it promotes student engagement with the course material by fostering critical thinking and reflection. Psychology is a discipline that lends itself well to this approach because many students have likely spent little time reflecting on the causes of behavior. There are also an almost unlimited number of everyday examples that illustrate psychological principles in action. I therefore utilize a large number of in-class, active learning activities, where students have the opportunity to apply what they are learning to these well known situations.

I also firmly believe that students must read the course material and have an opportunity to react to what they have read. Students must become engaged. For this reason, in all of my lower division courses, students turn in handwritten "Reaction Cards" on the assigned reading for that day, and these cards require them to critically reflect and personally react to an issue (or issues) that resonate with them. I model appropriate responses by sharing anonymous cards from previous semesters. These cards are excellent for promoting reading and provide a window into the thoughts of an entire class on a daily basis. In my PSYCH 414 course, I accomplish the same goal by having students write six critical analysis papers where they reflect on the readings of the previous two weeks after class discussion has already occurred.

Students must also have an opportunity to apply what they are learning through their own active efforts. This is learning in action, and it has no substitute. Three brief examples of active learning follow. First, in my cognition course, students work in small groups and collect data to (hopefully) replicate classic memory research. The students then present the results of their research to the campus community via a research poster fair, modeled on a professional convention. Second, in my developmental course, students work individually on a pressing developmental topic of interest (e.g., the prevalence of prosocial and antisocial behaviors on television) by collecting data. They then integrate their findings with those in the published literature in a final course paper. Third, eight students have taken my PSYCH 100 course as an honor's option, requiring each to undertake significant independent and in-depth learning.

The pedagogy I use in my senior-level Social and Personality Development course (see PSYCH 414 Syllabus) exemplifies my best practices in teaching. In this course, my primary goal is the joint discovery of knowledge alongside my students. I model the course on a graduate seminar, and every year I include a number of primary sources that we are all reading for the first time. The students work together in pairs (and later singly) and are responsible for generating questions and leading discussion after consultation with me. Although students are initially anxious with this format, the evolution that I observe between the first and last weeks in the students' abilities to critically analyze research in the field is simply amazing.

In my view, there is no one "best" way to teach. My philosophy and pedagogy fit well with my own personal traits and attributes but I still have much to learn. While I am deeply appreciative of the encouraging words I have received from former students I am also never completely satisfied with a course, even if by all objective measures, it went well. I am constantly evolving as a teacher.