

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY & INTERESTS

“A teacher cannot give students knowledge. A teacher cannot make students learn. A teacher can only be a guide, walking the path of knowledge in hopes that it may inspire others to rise to their feet.”

-Anonymous

I was a chronic underachiever as a high school student. Bored and unmotivated, stories of my spotty attendance record were legendary among my peers and teachers alike. Despite my adolescent distaste for all things scholarly, I decided to attend college. This decision had more to do with pleasing my parents than with wanting to actually learn anything and – accordingly – I planned to quietly coast through college using the least amount of effort possible. Nothing could have prepared me for the dramatic transformation in my attitude that began to occur after only one week of classes. I began to see college as an opportunity to discover new ideas rather than a means to a still undecided end. More specifically, I began to understand that science – social and otherwise – isn’t about memorizing lists of facts, but rather is a dynamic process of uncovering emerging truths based on gathered empirical evidence. I owed this change of heart to an enthusiastic professor whose excitement for her area of expertise was so palpable that I couldn’t help but get caught up in what she was teaching. I became motivated to perform well in her class and it soon carried over to the other courses in which I was enrolled. By the end of my first semester in college, I knew that I was going to be a professor: participating in the process of uncovering the many mysteries of human social behavior and inviting students along to join me in the process.

Based on my experiences as both a student and an instructor, I have found that the most effective way to capture students’ imaginations and instill in them the desire to learn is to be an enthusiastic seeker of knowledge oneself. As such, I attempt to utilize my role as an active researcher and scholar to get students excited about discovering new ideas and becoming active consumers of psychological research. I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact that a dedicated instructor can make on a college student’s life and I strive to provide nothing less for my own students.

I LOVE WHAT I DO AND IT SHOWS

Enthusiasm is my most defining characteristic both as a psychological scientist and as a psychology instructor. When students see an instructor who demonstrates a passion for the subject he/she is researching and teaching, inevitably they are affected by this energy and will engage themselves actively in the learning process. From the beginning of each course, I strive to create a relaxed learning atmosphere in my classroom so that all of my students feel comfortable participating in class. My genuine concern for students' progress, acknowledgement

of their achievements in class, and conversational teaching style contribute to this atmosphere. I use a variety of teaching methods in my classroom, with the ultimate goal of guiding students toward an understanding and appreciation of psychological science. As an active researcher and scholar in psychology, I am able to provide students with the tools necessary for becoming careful consumers of psychological research and participants in the scientific process. I encourage interested students to assist in on-going research projects and to set up appointments to further discuss topics that they find interesting. More specifically, I strive to remain mindful of the following goals when preparing lessons and teaching:

- Respect my students as individual scholars who each come to my classroom with different learning styles and goals. Since there is no such thing as a ‘typical student’, I employ a variety of teaching techniques and learning strategies when presenting new material. For example, when presenting an abstract concept that students may have difficulty grasping, I make liberal use of practical examples and suggest mnemonic devices that may help students remember unfamiliar terms. Additionally, I encourage students to be active participants in class by asking a variety of discussion questions and maintaining a comfortable learning atmosphere where students are not afraid to ask questions or challenge assumptions of existing psychological thought.
- Disregard for those aspects of a student that are irrelevant to their role as intelligent, thoughtful scholars. These include, but are not limited to: a) gender, b) race, c) ethnicity, d) disability, e) sexual orientation, f) religious beliefs, g) veteran status, h) marital status, i) age, j) political penchants, and k) immigrant status. A student is a human being and – as such – has the same rights to participate in the learning process as every other human being in the university.
- Maintain a commitment to presenting information that is as up-to-date as possible. I consistently aim to present research that represents the most current thinking in the field within its relevant historical and philosophical context.
- Maintain a sense of professionalism and respect in the classroom. I strive to gain and maintain the respect of my students by treating them objectively and consistently with regards to grading and evaluation, arriving to class on time, providing students with appropriate and prompt performance feedback, being well-prepared with lecture and discussion materials, and enforcing the standards outlined above.
- Continually learn from my mistakes. Although I work hard to provide the best possible learning environment for my students, I realize that I am not perfect. I strive to learn from my teaching successes and failures and continually develop my teaching strategies based on student and professional feedback. To this end, I have my students provide an informal, anonymous mid-semester evaluation in which they are asked to describe what teaching techniques and activities that they have found useful and those that they have found to be less-than useful. I use this feedback to shape the teaching techniques that I employ for the rest of the semester. I have found that this feedback-response process is empowering to students, making them feel like more active participants in their educational process.

TEACHING INTERESTS

I am prepared or interested in teaching the following courses

- Social Psychology
- Evolution & Social Behavior / Evolutionary Psychology
- Emotion and Motivation
- Interpersonal Relationships: An Evolutionary Approach
- Social Cooperation and Conflict
- Evolution, Culture, and Behavior
- Psychology of Human Mating
- Social Cognition and Decision-Making
- Introductory Psychology
- Behavior Genetics
- Psychology and the Law
- Research Methods
- Statistics