

Teaching Statement

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One of the keys to effective teaching is to create the proper educational environment. Students must feel that they are valued members of a class and that their involvement is important. I strive to create discussions in which students feel free to express their ideas and in which their individual views are respected. I also believe that it is essential for students to feel a sense of personal control over their learning, performances, and grades in the class. In particular, students need to believe that their success on the exams and assignments is a direct function of their studying and their mastery of the course material. My classes are highly organized and structured. I am explicit about course requirements, and the format and content of the exams. I do not want my students constantly guessing about what they are going to do in class, what is expected of them, and the basis for their grades. My feeling is that they experience enough uncertainty and anxiety in trying to grasp the course material and in trying to get through the day. Finally, I believe that the course material must be presented at a level where students are conceptually challenged. Students in my classes are required to learn about important empirical findings, concepts, theories, and applications, not fluff.

I strive to educate my students about the relevant empirical literature with a minimum of political editorializing. This does not mean that the material is presented in a dry and impersonal way. To the contrary, I try to make it apparent to students that the concepts and theories reviewed in class are relevant to their lives and their communities. Thus, students are

encouraged to relate the course topics to their personal life contexts and experiences during course discussions. I am constantly asking questions in class because I do not want students to passively process the material. They are prompted to think about the possible causes of important phenomena, the processes through which behavioral outcomes occur, and the implications of important patterns of behavior. I want them to ground their thinking empirically, to consider alternative explanations for behavior, and to recognize the social relevance of important phenomena. In short, I teach my students to think a little like behavioral scientists.