Tsethlikai Teaching Statement

My teaching philosophy is guided by a constructivist approach that promotes active learning. I strive to allow for variations in ways of knowing and understanding as well as variations in learner's contexts. I hope to empower students to move beyond memorizing facts to actively constructing a deeper understanding of the course topics. Additionally, I focus on teaching the skills employers want college students to learn including: 1) the ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing; 2) the ability to think analytically and critically; 3) the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings; 4) the ability to analyze and solve complex problems; and 5) the ability to connect choice and actions to ethical decisions (The National Association of Colleges, 2010).

In order to help students learn constructively and master the skills listed above, I assign a number of writing assignments and provide students with critical feedback in order to help students learn how to support their interpretations of the material with scientific evidence rather than statements of belief. Additionally, I encourage my students to question everything I say and everything they read because science cannot progress without critical thinking, and without their unique viewpoints and ways of understanding.

To engage my students in active constructive learning, I incorporate online demonstrations and video clips to demonstrate the concepts both visually and verbally. I try to make the subject matter relevant to them, by showing clips from current films and having students address a question that is brought up in the film using the research they have read in class to give advice or recommendations. Indeed, a former student wrote that he was upset that he had to watch a movie in order to complete his assignment, but he quickly realized that the film depicted many of the concepts we were learning about in class so by the time he sat down to write his essay, he was actually excited about the assignment. I believe writing assignments helps students apply what they are learning and these assignments convey the importance of disseminating knowledge about human development throughout the lifespan to the public. Even my students in statistics have to write much more than they think they should (as one student said as he left class one day, "I didn't think I would have to write a book in statistics!") in response to my requiring all students to write up their homework results in APA style and more importantly to state the meaning of the statistical test results in words with the independent and dependent variables specified in the write-up. Additionally, at the end of the semester students must read an empirical article and evaluate their learning in the class by writing about the parts of the manuscript that made sense to them due to taking statistics, and also commenting on what they did not understand prior to taking the course and still do not understand. (My way of showing them that one class in statistics is not enough.)

In all of my classes, I frequently bring in news articles that highlight the importance of what the students are learning. One class in which this is easy and fun to do is my

Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood class. In this class, I supplement the textbook with a number of readings focused on brain development in adolescence. As adolescents frequently make poor decisions that make the headlines, students enjoy applying their new knowledge about the changes the adolescent brain is undergoing in discussing these articles in class. For their final projects, the students form public policy groups and develop presentations designed to change public policy using evidence-based practice. The students enjoy the opportunity to work collaboratively and to gain public-speaking skills, and moreover, many have commented that they enjoy having the chance to actually apply their knowledge in a way that could potentially change actual laws and help develop new programs for youth.

In order to get students to engage with me outside of the classroom, I keep a number of office hours and encourage students to come and get help when needed. I use online teaching tools such as Canvas to provide easy access to the lecture notes and course materials. I continually strive to improve my teaching and make the material the students need to master easier to grasp conceptually. For example, for my statistics class I am currently working with a former student who is helping me develop a lab manual that will teach the students how to use SPSS, develop hands-on projects, and create worksheets designed to reduce cognitive load with the goal of helping students master the theoretical basis of statistics. We are developing this project jointly through the Utah Undergraduate Student Experts on Teaching Program. I hope that making the conceptual and theoretical foundations of statistics meaningful through self-guided application will help students better understand the importance of statistics in their everyday lives.

I teach one graduate level core course on cognitive development. I have only taught this course twice due to the fact that we do not have a large program. My primary goal in my graduate teaching is to provide students with a developmental understanding of the changing cognitive abilities of children and adults at different stages of life such that they can apply this knowledge to their clinical practices and/or their experimental designs. In addition, I want students to develop a solid understanding of the many different theoretical approaches to studying cognitive development, including an understanding of how each theory informs design and interpretation. The specific goals for all assignments are: 1) to have students identify how our understanding of cognitive development has changed over time and be able to cite examples of the empirical results that led to these changes; 2) to critically evaluate the theory or theories guiding the research based on the evidence presented; and 3) to discuss how they can use what they read to inform their own research (i.e., were their beliefs challenged, did they read anything that provided new insight into the work they are doing; how might the theoretical framework and/or empirical results be used to guide their research).

I was much more successful at meeting my goals the second time I taught this course than I was the first time. The improvement in my ratings as a graduate instructor were

largely due to a complete restructuring of the course in which I compiled a series of readings on each topic and created three groups with one or two assigned articles. I allowed each student to select the group s/he wanted to be in that week. The first class meeting dedicated to each topic was focused on lecture in order to provide coverage of the core concepts and research. The second class meeting was committed to helping the students gain breadth and depth in the topic by creating concept maps of their selected readings by group and presenting their maps to the other groups. The students then collectively linked the commonalities and discussed the differences depicted in each of the concept maps. Students reported that they enjoyed having the option of selecting their reading group each week, and creating the concept maps really helped them understand the material.

In addition to the courses I currently teach, I would like to develop and teach a seminar on developmental theory at the graduate level. I also think it would be fun to develop an undergraduate course on the development of memory using films/ads/products to help students make connections between science and popular culture.