Teaching Statement

I have had the opportunity to teach a diverse range of University of Utah students. Certain courses were designed for students taking a psychology course for the first time, while others were intended for advanced graduate students. My approach to teaching is student-centered. As such, the specific teaching practices I use differ based on the context and the needs of the students. Regardless of the context though, my goals as an educator are to foster students’ knowledge of the key principles in psychology, sharpen their abilities to think critically about complex issues, and cultivate their potential for creatively applying the information to real-world situations and issues.

Undergraduate-level instruction
I regularly teach two undergraduate psychology classes: Introduction to Psychology and Social Development. Despite the fact that both courses have large enrollments, I aim to apply evidence-based instructional practices to that have proven to be effective at promoting students’ learning in science-related subjects (e.g., Kober, 2015). The first is to simplify the complexity of a topic by emphasizing higher-order concepts and principles. The primary way I accomplish this is by organizing each class session around a small number of learning objectives. These represent the core theoretical ideas, research questions, or methodological approaches that I want students to understand and critically evaluate. A second evidence-based teaching practice I apply is promoting students’ active engagement in the learning process. I accomplish this by strategically punctuating lectures with opportunities for student involvement. Specific examples include open-ended questions about a research study that elicit student input, group-based activities where students are involved in peer learning, or using technology to evaluate students’ understanding of the topics in real-time or survey their opinions on class-related topics. A third evidence-based teaching practice is highlighting the connections between the course information and their own lives. I model this by discussing events from my life or thoughtfully using media examples that illustrate the psychological principle being discussed in class. I also explicitly note wherever possible the practical relevance of research findings for contemporary societal issues, and I encourage students to spend time in class thinking or discussing personal examples of the phenomena. Finally, I use writing assignments to help students connect the material discussed in this course to real-world situations.

Graduate-level instruction
I had the opportunity to lead a graduate seminar in my substantive area. In that course, I adopted the same general approach to teaching, albeit in ways that were appropriate to more advanced graduate students. For example, I emphasized higher-order concepts and principles by organizing each class session focused a single theoretical tenet or methodological approach. The readings and class discussion were intended to promote students’ understanding of the longstanding controversies and theoretical debates along with the unresolved issues that require future research attention. Second, I sought to promote active engagement in the learning process by requiring them to submit questions based on the readings prior to each class. These questions were then used to stimulate class discussion. Third, students were required to write a paper considering the connections between the course information and their own research interests and activities.
Research supervision

The third context in which I teach students is by supervising a relatively large team of 12-15 undergraduate research assistants. I meet with students one-on-one or in small groups to help them develop technical skills, such as processing physiological data, coding participants’ interviews, or conducting statistical analyses. In addition, I meet with all of the students each week during our lab meetings. At least half of our lab meeting time is devoted to promoting students’ conceptual understanding of the connections between the specific activities they do in the lab and the broader research questions they are interested in. Each student is encouraged to lead a discussion of a theoretical or empirical paper that addresses a topic related to their interests at least once each semester. Although challenging for many students, this fosters their understanding of their own professional interests and goals. As evidence of the effectiveness of my mentorship, two groups of students from my lab presented research at the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association as well as at the CSBS research day last spring. In addition, I am currently supervising one UROP-funded research project and one honor’s student project.