Teaching Statement

Course Instruction

“The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards.” – Anatole France. To be human is to have natural curiosity about people. We all have questions that can be answered by social science: why do people join fraternities? Why don’t more people recycle? Why are there more males than females in the chemistry major? As a teacher, I capitalize on this curiosity, knowing that all students can learn to appreciate social science because it provides a systematic, unbiased way to satiate their natural desire to know why people behave the ways that they do. Since 2014, I have taught three undergraduate lecture-based courses and seven seminar courses (undergraduate and graduate), with an additional new course preparation in progress. I have guest-lectured in one graduate seminar. (In my first three semesters at Utah, I have taught a different class each semester.)

The course that I have taught most consistently to date is Cultural Psychology (P179S & PSY 3450), which I have now taught in Winter Quarter 2015 (UCI), Fall Quarter 2015 (UCI), and Fall Semester 2016 (Utah). My teaching evaluations in this course were consistently and increasingly positive over time. The students’ ratings of overall course value increased from 4.91/7 to 5.71/7 to 5.9/6, and ratings of my overall teaching effectiveness increased from 4.97/7 to 5.83/7 to 6/6. In P179S, I used several techniques to engage the students in the course material, such as iClickers and an emphasis on real-world examples to illustrate concepts. One of my iclicker questions revealed that the majority of my students came from households with parents born outside of the U.S. I drew on the diversity of my classroom by explicitly connecting cultural psychological concepts to my students’ experiences with their families and/or friends and shared a few personal experiences to illustrate the utility of a cultural psychological approach to understanding human psychology and behavior. Further, my final exam always includes an extra credit question in which students could discuss how a concept learned in class applied, or did not apply, to their own lives. My efforts encouraged students to not only learn the theoretical bases of cultural differences but also to appreciate this knowledge beyond the classroom (e.g., “I enjoyed taking this class very much. The professor made the subject really easy to understand and made it easy to apply to everyday life.”). One of my Winter 2015 P179S students, a sight-impaired underrepresented racial minority student, emailed me over a year later to thank me for my involvement in his academic career: “It's a pleasure to take the time to write to you. I have officially completed my B.A. degree in Psychology and Social Behavior at UCI since we last spoke and even finished a quarter early! Also, I will be receiving the Chancellor's Award of Distinction during commencement thanks to my roles in research and community service concerning disability awareness outreach on campus. I share these updates with you because I remember our conversations and interactions fondly. Please know that I am glad to have had you as an instructor, and I look forward to following your line of work as you further your research goals as well. Many thanks for playing a part in my career development.”

Teaching the same course content at the University of Utah (PSY 3450) had its unique challenges. The course fulfills a diversity GE requirement and, consequently, the students come to class with varying levels of interest in the material and disparate levels of experience with
advanced psychological methods and topics. Nonetheless, I received high ratings in course value and teaching effectiveness (with a modal response of 6/6). Furthermore, it is important to note that I was teaching about politically sensitive topics in the course (such as the widespread association of Black with criminally in U.S. culture and debates on colorblindness vs. multicultural ideology) in a politically conservative state during the 2016 election. Despite the political polarization that permeates every aspect of our society, including our classrooms and campuses, I received ratings of 5.9/6 on my ability to create a classroom environment that was sensitive and respectful. Students commented that my teaching was “very respectful to others’ opinions” and created an atmosphere “of respect and dignity.”

My course evaluations in seminar courses are consistently high. In my undergraduate seminar courses (P196, SE 195), students rate the course value highly and many attest to my approachability and helpfulness in the open-ended comments. In my graduate seminar courses (P275, P293, PSY 7964), I have also received high ratings in course value and teaching effectiveness. I have taught Intergroup Relations twice, once at UCI (Winter 2015) and once at Utah (Spring 2017). Qualitative feedback indicated that students consistently valued my ability to give historical context to the selected readings, indicating how they were significant in shaping the direction and development of the field. At Utah, I added an assignment in which students had to formulate research questions to conduct secondary data analyses and submit a short report of their findings. One of the doctoral students from PSY 7964 completed this assignment and, upon my suggestion, we are currently revising it into a manuscript that we will submit for publication this semester (Chambers & Chen, in prep).

Mentoring and Research Supervision

Since 2014, I have been primary advisor to two doctoral students (Jasmine Norman, Yeseul Nam) and co-advisor to one student (Angela Robinson, UCI). I am also conducting research projects with other graduate students in Psychology (Danielle Geerling) and in Management (Michelle Chambers, Rachael Goodwin). I have served on a total of eight dissertation committees and four masters committees. This semester (Fall 2017), I will chair two masters committees for my students at Utah.

I supervised one post-baccalaureate student (who is currently a first year doctoral student in Social Psychology at Cornell), five undergraduate honors theses (one more in progress, with Carol Sansone), four UROP awards (two additional UROP awards in progress, one with Paul White; two additional were submitted for Spring 2018), and two SURP awards. I have supervised over 35 undergraduate students as Research Assistants. Two of my former undergraduate students received the UCI Social Ecology Dean’s Award, a prestigious award that is given to only three graduating students each year who are “chosen based on demonstration of outstanding research and scholarship.” My research interests and deep commitment to diversity and inclusion have attracted underrepresented minority students from many backgrounds, including Native American, Latinx, Black, and first-generation college students.

I have also participated in many outreach events geared toward professional development of underrepresented minority students and increasing campus inclusiveness via closer interaction with faculty. I participated in a panel hosted by UCI Graduate Division and the ADVANCE Program, “Getting the faculty position: Strategies for successfully locating and applying for faculty positions.” The panel was attended by advanced graduate students and post-docs, and was specifically geared towards UCI Chancellor’s and UC President’s Post-doctoral Fellows. In
addition, I was one of three faculty members who participated in a UCI Social Ecology Community Building Workshop hosted by the Social Ecology ACCESS Mentorship Program, which pairs low income, first-generation college students with student mentors to facilitate their transition to and success in the college environment. In this workshop, I participated in ice-breaker activities with the undergraduate students before participating in a panel on career and graduate school options. I participated in a panel on graduate school preparedness in the “Graduate School Opportunities and Preparation” course that was developed by UCI Student Support Services to benefit first generation and/or low-income students. I also led a Psychology and Social Behavior grant workshop for graduate students interested in applying to the UC President’s and Chancellor’s Post-doc Program, and I was a panelist for the UCI Graduate Division/ADVANCE Panel on “Transitioning to the Next Phase of Your Career” for the President’s/Chancellor’s Dissertation and Postdoc Fellows. In Spring 2017, I attended the planning event for the meeting of the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS). In Fall 2017, I coordinated the Department’s Hospitality Booth at SACNAS and also attended the conference as a poster judge.