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.

While at the University of Utah, I have taught two offerings of Cross-Cultural Psychology (PSY 3450), an undergraduate honors seminar in Social Cognition (PSY 4963), and a graduate seminar in Intergroup Relations. Based on the success of the undergraduate seminar in Social Cognition, I successfully developed and proposed a new social core course, Social Cognition (PSY 3415).

The course that I have taught most frequently to date is Cross-Cultural Psychology (P179S & PSY 3450), which I taught in Winter Quarter 2015 (UCI), Fall Quarter 2015 (UCI), Fall Semester 2016 (Utah), and Spring Semester 2018 (Utah). My teaching evaluations for this course were consistently and increasingly positive over time. The students’ ratings of overall course value increased from 4.91/7 (Winter 2015) to 5.7/6 (Spring 2018). The students’ ratings of my teaching effectiveness increased from 4.97/7 to 5.6/6.

Teaching Cross-Cultural Psychology at Utah has its unique challenges. The course fulfills a diversity GE requirement and, consequently, the enrolled students have varying levels of interest in the material and disparate levels of experience with advanced psychological methods and concepts. Nonetheless, I received high ratings in course effectiveness (Utah avg rating 5.5/6) and teaching effectiveness (Utah avg rating 5.6/6). Furthermore, it is important to note that I discuss politically sensitive topics in the course, such as racial disparities in policing outcomes. I have devised specific teaching strategies to create a classroom environment of respect and intellectual empathy, which is especially important in politically polarized classrooms. For example, I discuss the psychological origins of intergroup bias and emphasize that having some degree of bias in favor of ingroups relative to outgroups is natural. I underscore that no one, including myself, is immune to these psychological leanings. I have received high ratings on my ability to create a classroom environment that is sensitive and respectful (Utah avg 5.8/6).

Students have also provided written comments that I was “very respectful to others’ opinions” and created an atmosphere “of respect and dignity.” It is particular rewarding for me as a teacher when students cultivate an understanding of different backgrounds, especially those of individuals with whom they disagree. A student recently commented: “I now understand why there’s a diversity requirement for pursuing a bachelor’s degree. I learned a lot in this course.”

In the future, I will build on these successes as effective teacher to enrich my students’ experiences further. I seek to increase student engagement with the material within the large lecture course format. In Fall 2018, I have added asynchronous, web-based teaching strategies, such as Canvas discussion board assignments in which students must respond to prompts related to the lecture content. Students must also reply to a certain number of posts by classmates. With these blended teaching strategies, I aim to further leverage the diversity within the classroom to increase students’ application of lecture material to the real world and their exposure to diverse (and diverging!) perspectives.
My evaluations in seminar courses are also consistently high. In my undergraduate seminars (P196, SE 195, PSY 4963), students rate the course effectiveness highly (Utah avg 5.83/6). Many commented on my approachability and helpfulness. In my graduate seminars (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. At Utah, I created an assignment in which students had to formulate research questions to conduct secondary data analyses and submit a short report of their findings. In this way, I aim to strike a balance between teaching essential theoretical and empirical advances from the literature and encouraging original research. One of the doctoral students from PSY 7964 completed this assignment and, upon my suggestion, we are currently revising it to submit for publication (Chambers & Chen, in prep). I have also begun a collaboration with another doctoral student from PSY 7964 resulting from her final paper (Goodwin, Dodson, Chen, & Diekmann, in progress).

Mentoring and Research Supervision

I am primary advisor to two doctoral students (Jasmine Norman, Yeseul Nam) and co-advisor to one student (Angela Robinson, UCI). In Fall 2017, I chaired Ms. Nam’s master’s committee. We accepted her master’s thesis from Yonsei University and outlined her remaining degree requirements. I am also chair of Ms. Norman’s masters committee. We approved her master’s thesis proposal in Spring 2018, and she will defend in Fall 2018. In addition, Ms. Norman recently submitted a first-authored article under my supervision (Norman & Chen, under review). I also have ongoing research projects with other graduate students in Psychology (Danielle Geerling) and in Management (Michelle Chambers, Rachael Goodwin). Through frequent meetings and correspondence, I monitor their progress closely and give guidance on each step of their specific research projects. I also serve as a member of the dissertation committees of Ms. Geerling and Ms. Lisa Meerts-Brandsma (Parks and Recreation). To date, I have served on a total of eight dissertation committees and four masters committees.

I supervised one post-baccalaureate student, six undergraduate honors theses (one at Utah co-advised with Carol Sansone), seven UROP awards (four at Utah, two of which were jointly supervised with Drs. Sansone and White), and two SURP awards (one at Utah). One of my UROP students, Natalia Avril, presented at the principal convention for social psychologists (SPSP) in Atlanta in March 2018 and at SACNAS 2017 in Salt Lake City. Another UROP student, Sophia Hill, presented at our College’s annual Research Day. In total, I have supervised over 40 undergraduate students as Research Assistants (17 at Utah). 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. Through my own example as a professor, I strive to inspire my students to feel that they are capable of achieving academic success in the lab and in the classroom.

I have also participated in many outreach events geared toward professional development of underrepresented minority students and increasing campus inclusiveness. I have participated in mentoring panels for first-generation undergraduate students, Psychology doctoral students, and interdisciplinary post-doctoral fellows who are preparing for their first faculty positions. In 2018, I led a seminar on how to overcome implicit biases for Mathematics and Statistics graduate students at Utah State University.