Teaching Statement
David Sanbonmatsu
February 20, 2018

Much about teaching in higher education has changed over the last decade. Teaching is more structured and regimented to the point that I have had to work diligently to implement the instructional guidelines that were given to me by the department and the Center for Learning Excellence. I am much more explicit now about the objectives of my courses and specific lesson plans, and more deliberate in linking these goals to the assessment procedures. My syllabi are much thicker now as they articulate policies, consequences, accommodations, and resources in great detail. More generally, I have been made to recognize the need for tangible evidence of learning and greater accountability. Although I confess to being a little annoyed about having to implement these changes, I believe that the guidelines have helped to improve my courses.

Nevertheless, my general approach to teaching has not changed because the fundamentals of teaching remain largely the same. The importance of preparation, clarity of presentation, organization, and fair grading has not diminished. I have always strived to make my courses interactive. Although I have shied away from group projects, I continue to make discussion a central part of every class. I want my students to generate and critique ideas, articulate their thoughts, engage in civil discourse, and to think like social scientists. As a theoretically oriented researcher, I have always taught the basic theories and concepts that are central to my field. At the same time, I continue to make these ideas relevant to students through the concrete presentation of everyday examples and applications. As the instructor of an ethnic studies course, I have always strived to convey the value of diversity and inclusiveness. Finally and perhaps most importantly, I remain committed to the education of my students. This is apparent in the time I spend preparing for classes that I have taught for the 25th time and my willingness to work with students who are struggling because of learning issues, or health, family, or work problems.

I have a good record as a graduate supervisor. All of my students have progressed through our graduate program at a timely rate and every one of them has attained a doctorate or a master’s. However, I am a bad role model for my students on a number of dimensions and have to resort to instructing them to be like Bert or Carol. Moreover, because of long standing questions about our research enterprise (which we are writing about in our current science of science paper), I am unable to deliver inspirational monologues to them about the glories of our profession. My students succeed in the program because they work hard and because I make their careers my priority. I work hard to develop them as scientists and to instill the correct norms of professional conduct. My inclination is to provide students with a great deal of guidance, feedback, and structure as this provides them with the foundations that are necessary for them to become independent scholars and teachers.