Teaching and Supervision

This is my first year teaching after serving as Department Chair and then having an administrative leave (so, first time in 5 years), and so only have two courses to describe.

Advanced Social Psychology (5410/6410). I was asked to take over the responsibility for teaching the Advanced Social Psychology core class (which I had previously taught before Lisa Aspinwall started teaching the course in 2007; because she became Department Chair, she was not able to continue to offer the course). I was also asked to schedule it so that it met just one afternoon a week, to facilitate students’ schedules. In that context, (and looking at student evaluations from the last time I offered the course) I substantially revised how I taught the course this past Fall.

In particular, I revamped the course to emphasize the findings from motivation and education, and how to foster deep learning. Thus, I selected the topics to not only survey some of the basic and well known areas in social psychology, but structured coverage so that they built on each other (so that topics later in the course involved constructs from earlier in the course). Furthermore, I worked to make the learning opportunities involve active engagement, where students made connections to important and current issues and problems in the real world. To facilitate this, I identified a “Slice of Life” article (a short column or story from the NY Times) that was associated with each topic. Students were required to think about and be able to discuss how the social psychology readings from that week helped to understand the issues raised by the Slice of Life articles (as well as potential limitations of the research). Working in groups, students were responsible for leading discussion on two of the topics, as well as presenting one additional social psychology article of their choosing related to the discussion. I worked with the students as they generated the discussion questions for their week and suggested articles they might present. Students also had to write in response to a discussion question for 4 other weeks, and develop a research proposal that was submitted at the end of the semester applying something from social psychology to their own interests. (see syllabus for more details)

What worked: students were actively discussing concepts from social psychology and making connections at a level that I did not see when I taught the course as primarily a lecture course. In addition, students seemed to stay motivated, found other examples or clips to show in class, and so on. I felt that students learned at a deeper level, making connections between different topics on their own. I was pleased with that!

What didn’t work so well: It was clear that for some of the topics, more direction from me would be beneficial (i.e., particularly for those with no social psychology background, some of the topics were hard to comprehend without greater scaffolding). Thus, I am planning to do some short summaries at the beginning of each topic discussion (I did them for a few topics, or did an impromptu one at times when people were confused, so I’m planning to integrate this better next time I teach the course).

Social Psychology Research Methods (6420). I teach this course as a workshop of sorts, where students 1) work through the decisions necessary for a research project that they are
planning to do and 2) learn and practice peer reviewing of others’ work. As someone who has edited a volume on research methods and well as participated in a SPSP task force on best practices for research, it seems that training in both roles is important for their own development as well as the health of the field. I updated the course to begin with the discussion of the “replication crisis”, and what it means for generating their own research. This semester the enrollment is low (given low enrollment year in the social program), but we petitioned and received the OK to add a 5000 level section of the course, which will allow advanced undergraduates (e.g. those working on an honor’s theses) to participate as well (in the past, I taught a similar kind of course for undergraduates at the 4000 level, so this would combine the two courses).

**Supervision and mentoring.**

I have been continuously involved in graduate student research supervision. This is a responsibility that I take very seriously and spend a lot of time on. I typically begin by providing a lot of structure, and then I gradually withdraw that structure and encourage the structure to emerge from the students. My hope is that the students I supervise will end up being my research collaborators and not just my students. I have found that each student presents a unique combination of strengths and weaknesses. My goal is to facilitate the strengths and help to overcome the weaknesses. This is something I am always learning how to do (for myself and for my students!), and do better, and I often seek consultation from colleagues when I have doubts about the best way to work through a problem. On the other hand, working with students in this way is also something that has provided me a lot of enjoyment, and I continue to learn from them as well!

Over the past few years, I have supervised 4 graduate students. One, Tami Fraughton, successfully defended her Ph.D. and is employed in a research position in industry. Aviva Sinclair is in her 7th year, and is writing her dissertation (she is supposed to defend by the end of this semester); the dissertation committee is co-chaired with Craig Bryan. Elissa Lauber came in to our program with a Master’s degree. Her interest in a research career has unfortunately decreased over time, and she is interested in working in industry. We are now concentrating on her developing a project that could come from the applied work she has been doing as part of the online initiative assessment, with the goal of finishing next year. Finally, Danielle Geerling is in her 3rd year. She just successfully defended her master’s thesis, and is on track for all requirements. She has been a co-author on two chapters, and will be taking the lead on several papers to come out of her thesis work and other research projects she has been involved in.

At the undergraduate level, I have worked with a number of honor’s students (in fact, I was one of 9 faculty in our college recognized by our college and the Honors College last year for having supervised at least 3 honor’s theses over the previous 5 years). I am currently working with two students (one with Jackie Chen as co-advisor) in the honors program. Graduate students typically play an important role in this process, as they learn how to mentor other’s in research (under my supervision). The process seems to work well.

My goals are to continue to develop my courses as I take up teaching again, and to continue to supervise students.
Carol Sansone  
TFR, Spring, 2017

Service

Department Service.

I served as Interim Department Chair from 2011-2012 and Department Chair from 2012-2015. The emergency nature of the interim chair position was a difficult time for me personally and for the department (when in addition to losing Fred Rhodewalt, we also lost a long time staff member, Nancy Klekas, within days of each other). However, we worked through that difficult time together as a department. In my time as chair, I worked with two deans, and two academic vice president, which made the context fluid and challenging (but ultimately, we moved in a positive direction). During my time as chair I worked closely with my associate-chairs and executive committee to help the department to embrace greater flexibility in how we defined ourselves and in how we thought about potential resources, and to place ourselves in a position for growth allied with emerging trends in the field. One of the things that I thought was important was to invest in research infrastructure, and so during my time we developed or expanded support for shared computer labs and group software licensing. I also spearheaded the movement to get a Qualtrics license for our department (which we now share with the college), enabling faculty, staff and students to use the software at no charge. We also developed the NAS servers for in-department data storage for those researchers with very large data sets. I also started a policy of returning some of the indirects on grants to the PI and co-PIs on the projects. In addition to investing in research infrastructure, I also thought it was important to invest in our people, and so I worked with our dean as she worked with the AVP to get greater support for retaining our more senior faculty via enhancing salaries. We also invested in higher stipends for graduate students, better salaries (and titles) for staff, and recognition and support of career line faculty in their support of our teaching mission (which also allows tenure line faculty more time to spend on research). We also hired a number of excellent new faculty (and worked to make spousal accommodation work within and outside of our department). We invested in our undergraduate program, particularly in securing a substantial funding package to support systematic upgrades to our online courses (and we began developing our Asian campus, under Fran’s excellent efforts in that regard). I should also note that many hours were spent working with Nancy to make the Seismic building updates happen without compromising our research mission. We also worked to develop a plan and find funding to create a new shared research lab on the 9th floor. The funding, unfortunately, was still a work in progress when I ended my term (but current chair was able to make this work by working to incorporate the remodeling as part of the seismic update process). Etc.

For the current year, I am serving as social area coordinator, and on the PIE committee. This is a period of transition for the social area, and so we have started discussions about how to redefine our program given new faculty, and how we want to grow in the future. We have already implemented some changes in our program, and expect that we will continue to do so as the year continues (e.g., further develop some structure for students seeking internship opportunities).
For the last year and into the current year, I have also been supervising the design and assessment components of our undergraduate online initiative. This has meant meeting with faculty offering the courses being redesigned, developing and implementing measures and methods, supervising analyses, presenting results to stakeholders, and so on. This is not an official service assignment; it is something I started while chair and then continued during my administrative leave and up to today. I did this because I thought it was important, and I may be able to use some of the data for research questions (although the course redesigns and assessments were not focused on research questions, so not clear at this point whether we will be able to do that). This also provided funding and training opportunities for graduate students working with me and with Jon Butner, providing experience in a “real” research context that could be beneficial to those interested in research but not in academia. So, there were a number of good reasons to be involved, but I am not sure about the future of this effort, what the department wants to do, etc. It is important to note that part of this effort involved novel ways to collect students’ reactions in-the-moment, that we had started to implement through the volunteer efforts of a faculty member in School of Computing (Joe Zachary) who we had worked with on the NSF grant project. However, health issues make his involvement no longer possible, and so some of the things we were trying to do (e.g., get students’ reactions to changes at the time that they encountered those changes; tracking students’ behaviors as they interacted with course materials and integrating those behaviors with their self-reports) is not possible without additional resources (i.e., someone who can do what Joe was doing, either just for us or as part of what he/she does for the university more generally).

Service to the University of Utah outside of department

Served on the search committee for the College of Health Dean position, which resulted in the successful hiring of the current COH dean. This year, serving on the internal review committee for the Graduate Council Review of the School of Computing.

Service to field.

In addition to reviewing, served on an NSF panel for I-Test proposals in 2015.


Served on Society for Personality and Social Psychology Publication Committee, 2013-2016, serving as Chair of the committee during my last year.

I don’t have any particular goals for service! Just do my job! But the future of the online design/assessment efforts will need to be addressed if it is to be continued beyond this semester.