

Teaching Statement

As an instructor at the University of Utah, I have had the opportunity to work with a diverse group of students, ranging from undergraduate students enrolled in their first psychology course to advanced graduate students in our Psychology Ph.D. program. In all of these contexts, my goals as an educator are to foster students' understanding of foundational ideas and principles in psychology, cultivate students' abilities to think critically about complex questions related to human development, and encourage students' potential for creatively applying the information to effectively address real-world problems.

Classroom instruction

I have regularly taught two undergraduate psychology classes: Introduction to Psychology and Social Development. Although both courses have large enrollments, I apply two evidence-based instructional practices that have proven to be effective at promoting students' learning in science-related subjects (e.g., Kober, 2015). The first is emphasizing higher-order concepts and principles. Rather than focusing on the results of specific studies, names of historical figures, or dozens of specific vocabulary terms, I focus on overarching themes and ideas. The primary way I accomplish this is by organizing each class session around a small number of learning objectives. These learning objectives serve as the outline for each class session and are also the basis for how I evaluate student learning on quizzes/exams and writing assignments. A second evidence-based teaching practice I employ is highlighting the connections between the course information and real-world situations. For example, I use media examples to illustrate the phenomenon being discussed in class, and I take time to respectfully discuss the implications of the classroom concepts for contemporary societal issues (e.g., government policies regarding immigration, poverty, and gender) while not endorse position regarding these debates. I incorporate writing assignments that encourage students to connect the course material to their own lives. Students have generally reported high satisfaction with my classes. For example, for the 10 undergraduate classes I have taught students' ratings of my overall effectiveness as an instructor (using a 6-point scale) have ranged between 5.25 and 5.82 (combined average of 5.71).

I have also taught two graduate courses. One is a core course for the Developmental Area Ph.D. students. I had the opportunity to co-teach one of the core graduate courses for the Developmental area along with Cecilia Wainryb, who is a highly experienced and award-winning instructor. That afforded me the opportunity to learn new strategies for encouraging these advanced students to think critically about the central theoretical ideas regarding human social development. These included organizing the class sessions around student discussion rather than PowerPoint presentations, encouraging students to answer each other questions, and serving a devil's advocate role in order to foster more critical analysis of a topic. I successfully implemented these strategies when I led a graduate seminar in my substantive area during the upcoming Spring 2021 semester. For example, all of the graduate students who completed the end-of-semester teaching evaluation recommended me as an instructor.

Student supervision

Each semester, I supervise over a dozen undergraduate research assistants. These students play an indispensable role collecting and processing the data in my research lab, and my goal is for them to gain a deeper understanding of the research process and how to rigorously test ideas about human development. One way I accomplish this is with regular lab meetings. At least half of our lab meeting time is devoted to promoting students' understanding of the connections between the specific research activities in the lab and the broader questions that interest them. The other way I accomplish this goal is by supervising independent research projects and Psychology Honors projects. I regularly meet with these students to help them identify a specific research question, understand the existing theoretical and empirical literature on the topic, and refine their scientific writing and data analytic skills. One piece of evidence of my effectiveness with mentoring these students is the fact that several of the former research assistants in my lab have successfully applied to graduate programs in Social Work, School Psychology, and Industrial-Organizational Psychology.

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In addition, I am currently mentoring two graduate students in the Developmental Psychology Ph.D. program. Both students are making timely progress with their degree milestones, including successfully defending their Master Theses last year. I work closely with them to help them prepare submission for research conferences, manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals, and research awards while also ensuring they are developing the methodological and mentoring skills they will need to independently conduct research projects after completing their doctoral training.