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 students taking a psychology course for the first time to graduate students in the Psychology PhD program. In each of these contexts, my goals as an educator are to foster students’ understanding of the key principles and ideas in psychology, cultivate their abilities to think critically about complex issues related to human behavior and development, and encourage their potential for creatively applying the information to real-world situations and issues.

Classroom instruction

I regularly teach two undergraduate psychology classes: Introduction to Psychology and Social Development. Although both courses have large enrollments, I aim to apply evidence-based instructional practices that have proven to be effective at promoting students' learning in science-related subjects (e.g., Kober, 2015). The first practice is to emphasize higher-order concepts and principles. In other words, rather than focusing on the results of specific studies, names of historical figures, or dozens of key terms, I emphasize overarching themes or ideas. The primary way I accomplish this is by organizing each class session around a handful of learning objectives. These serve as the outline for each class session and are the basis for learning evaluations. A second evidence-based teaching practice I employ is highlighting the connections between the course information and their own lives. I use media examples that illustrate the phenomenon being discussed in class, and I incorporate writing assignments that encourage students to connect the course material to real-world situations. A third evidence-based teaching practice is promoting students' active engagement in the learning process. I strategically punctuate lectures with opportunities for student involvement, including class discussions of the practical relevance of research findings for contemporary societal issues.

I had the opportunity to lead a graduate seminar in my substantive area a few years ago. This semester, I am teaching one of the Developmental core graduate courses: Social Development Across the Life Span. I am co-teaching the course with my colleague Cecilia Wainryb, a highly experienced and award-winning instructor. My goal as a co-instructor in this course is to learn additional strategies for provoking these advanced students to think even more critically about the central theoretical ideas regarding human social development.

Student supervision

Undergraduate research assistants play an indispensable role collecting and processing data in my research lab. I supervise a nearly a dozen research assistants, and my goal is for the students to gain a deeper understanding of the research process and how to rigorously test ideas about developmental processes. 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 they are interested in. The other way I accomplish this goal is by supervising students' independent research projects. I regularly meet with these students one-on-one to help them identify a specific research question and to refine their writing and data analytic skills. I supervised two honors thesis projects last year, and I have supervised three UROP scholars in the last year.

In addition, I am currently mentoring two first-year graduate students in the Developmental PhD program. I am working with these students to devise an individual training plan for each of them. This process includes creating a timeline for developing specific methodological skills that will allow them to independently research their questions as well as identifying specific projects that address important issues related to their research interests. One of these graduate students has submitted a first-author manuscript based on her honors thesis (which I supervised), and both students will be submitting abstracts for an upcoming international research conference.