

## Teaching Statement

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Liberal arts education constantly reminds me of the proverb “give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” I believe that college courses should not only present students with specific subject material, but should also teach them skills that they can use later in other courses or after they leave school—skills such as critical thinking and writing. Therefore, instructors have two complementary responsibilities: to help bring meaning to their field by putting research in context and to teach students critical thinking skills that will serve them during college as well as after.

I have experience implementing these goals as a teaching assistant and as an instructor. I have served as a teaching assistant for *Introduction to Child Development*, *Prenatal Development*, *Language Acquisition* and *Senior Seminar in Psychology*. In the summer of 2005, I had primary responsibility for teaching *Experimental Psychology I*, an upper-level undergraduate course on experimental methods in psychology (designed for students preparing for graduate school). I was awarded teaching awards from both the Psychology Department and the University of Iowa Council on Teaching for my efforts in that course.

In the following sections I will outline my main approaches to implementing my teaching philosophy in the classroom, providing examples from my own teaching experience.

**Putting Research into Context.** Many advanced psychology classes require students to read and write research papers. To help students prepare for this, my lectures include examples of how the ideas from lecture are expressed in research papers (i.e., in “psych-speak”). I believe supplementing the course content with information about how researchers would discuss the content not only helps students to *write* papers but also to *read* scientific papers in other courses.

To show students that psychology is an active science and to encourage students to seek laboratory experience I use examples of real, current departmental research in lectures whenever fitting. Whenever possible I also try to relate concepts from lecture to ideas and issues that students themselves present. For example, in *Experimental Psychology I* I required students to write research papers on a topic of their choice. I used the experiment examples the students proposed to illustrate certain experimental designs. This technique is also motivating for the students and indicates my interest in their ideas and makes the material more tangible.

I enjoy providing in-class assignments because they allow students to learn problem solving approaches from each other and to discuss the material in their own words. For example, when we covered critical periods in *Introduction to Child Development*, I asked students to think up an experiment in which they could test whether an aspect of development was experience expectant or experience dependant. During these assignments I visit the groups individually to ask if students have questions. This provides students the opportunity to ask me questions in a smaller group setting and allows me to spend more time with individual students as needed.

**Teaching Critical Thinking Skills.** When re-introducing concepts that were covered in pre-requisite courses or previous chapters, I pose questions to probe students’ memories before presenting the definitions again, rather than simply restating the material. I believe this method highlights how the courses within a department build on each other and reminds students of how much they already know.

I believe exams should test more than students’ abilities to identify definitions. Therefore, when constructing exams I include short-answer questions that do not have a single “right” answer. For example, on an exam I might ask students to choose and justify one of two designs (longitudinal or cross-sectional) for a study on how prison morale changes over time—both designs would work well for different reasons. Such questions, then, allow students to not only recite the advantages of one design over the other, but also to critically consider each design.

Finally, I believe that critical and accurate evaluation of research ideas and data are vital to undergraduates earning a psychology degree. Therefore, I provide students with many opportunities to interpret graphs; allowing students to evaluate for themselves what the results of an experiment indicate, to draw conclusions based on these data and compare these conclusions to the authors’ interpretations and to consider about how the variables relate to each other—independently of how the authors may be interpreting the data.

I believe these teaching strategies and techniques help students to prepare for future classes and also to gain knowledge and skills that can be employed well after they earn their college degrees. I look forward to teaching as a faculty member and am particularly interested in teaching child development, research methods, basic statistics, and language acquisition.