

## Teaching Statement

Two central themes have predominated in my own teaching: to stimulate interest in the subject matter and promote critical thinking skills. I view these as the most important components in a thoughtful teaching philosophy. As students enroll in certain courses merely to fulfill requirements, they are often unable to see the relevance of the course material to their career objectives or to their lives in general. Thus, in order for students to become interested in the subject matter they must feel that the information is relevant to their lives. To this end, I believe it is important to provide a wide range of opportunities for students to creatively think of how the material they learn in the classroom is relevant to other domains of their lives.

Second, in order for students to adequately grasp the information that is presented to them during class lectures and discussion, it is important for them to learn how to ask thoughtful questions and critique the information that they are exposed to. Regardless of the career path that students enter after college, the ability to think critically is a skill that is important in any profession. To assist students in developing these skills, I often provide time in class to discuss a current “hot” topic being covered by the media and push students to analyze the event or topic from a personality psychology perspective.

Along with the aforementioned goals, it is also important to acknowledge different learning styles in the classroom. Some may be non-traditional students or English may be their second language. In these cases I have found it important to provide different types of learning opportunities. Small group work helps to alleviate the anxiety that some students feel when addressing larger groups, and permits the instructor to provide more individualized feedback. However, large group discussions allow the

sharing of multiple perspectives where all benefit from the information that is presented. A combination of both strategies enables me to provide valuable learning experiences. In addition, I also believe that sound teaching practices involve a combination of lecture, discussion, and media usage. For instance, in my own teaching I have used PowerPoint to graphically represent more complex topics, and to give students a visual picture to encourage retention of information. In my experience, when concepts are presented in a novel way, students are more likely to understand and remember them because of the unique approach taken to convey the information. Another novel approach that I use has been assigning activities that must be done outside of class. A key issue in personality psychology that I teach about is the importance for students to recognize how particular aspects of their identities influence how others perceive them. To demonstrate this, I have asked students to take on an identity that is foreign to them for one day (e. g., a student who is able-bodied would become physically handicapped in some way) to better understand the perspectives of someone who is very different from them. Students have commented over the years about how challenging, yet powerful the exercise has been for them and how they have grown to better understand the experiences of others.

As my goals for students are to develop critical thinking skills, and stimulate interest in the subject matter, I use short essays, and papers to evaluate them. My students are asked to synthesize information from multiple sources and disciplines and to evaluate the quality of the theory and research they are reading about. Most importantly, they are required to state their opinion and discuss how their thinking has evolved as a result. In order to further spark interest, I have also employed the use of guest speakers who are experts in the field to encourage students to think about future careers in psychology.