

During my time at the University of Michigan, I've had the opportunity to be a graduate student instructor for 3 different undergraduate psychology courses: Introduction to Psychology, Cognitive Psychology, and Developmental Psychology. On completing my third semester of teaching, I began to lay the groundwork for my own style and philosophy of instruction – both what I expect of my students and what I expect of myself. Importantly, my experiences thus far have highlighted for me the unique benefits of the college atmosphere in facilitating intergenerational dialogue, and the vital role that mentoring plays in my own participation in this dialogue. I know that students have had many, many classroom experiences at this point in their academic careers, and that they are able to take initiative for their own learning in collaborative situations if these are well-structured. This structure is my most important job, and I aim to provide a strong theoretical and practical knowledge base for students so that they can make the most of, and take responsibility for, their own undergraduate learning.

In creating a well-structured classroom environment, I have tried to conceptualize a learning experience that stems from introspection and practical application. I strive to create new and innovative formats that maintain student engagement while providing effecting solutions to student-based barriers to learning like inhibition, fatigue, stress, and insecurity. Whenever the opportunity arises, I try to emphasize students' responsibility for their own learning. To this end, I utilize a variety of assessment tools throughout the semester to target areas of improvement – for them and for me. Mid-semester evaluations have proven indispensable both for my own improvement in instruction and in facilitating dialogue between myself and my class. By initiating an atmosphere of mutual responsibility, I hope to emphasize the truly collaborative nature of classroom learning. To this end, I have utilized student-to-student feedback as a way to highlight students' responsibility for the learning environment. The first time I gave students the chance to (anonymously) give feedback about the overall performance of their classmates' presentations and discussion participation, I was surprised to realize how criticisms that had been directed outwardly (at me or at the nature of the coursework) could be constructively redirected once students were given the chance to evaluate their peers' performance. This exercise provided both them and me the opportunity to see how closely student performance and the learning environment are linked, and has reemphasized to me my conviction that undergraduate students themselves play a vital role in informing our teaching practices. I've been inspired to continue the self-assessment as an integral part of my own teaching growth.

I believe that what students want most is a teacher that offers the opportunity to learn and integrate new material. I believe that the majority of students at the undergraduate level want to spend their classroom time in true knowledge acquisition, and respect and value a teacher that stimulates thinking in novel and effective ways. I believe students value an atmosphere of enjoyment and excitement about learning, and respond with engagement and creativity to classroom structured around intellectual rigor and individual expression. Structure that is content-specific, student-focused, and flexible provides each student with the opportunity to realize concrete goals in a way that is challenging and satisfying at the same time. For example, alternating groupwork with individual journaling activities, with clearly defined goals and time limits, may allow students to explore alternative learning styles while at the same time avoiding the disengagement that sometimes results from their perception of particular techniques as incompatible with their own style.

I am continually amazed at the ways that courses differ in the demands they make, and the rewards they offer. Particularly as I've taught developmental psychology – a course with material that benefits most greatly from discussion and collaborative groupwork as opposed to direct instruction – I was continually challenged to find creative ways for students to discover, and engage, varying perspectives on socially-charged issues. This was not the case with cognitive psychology, a denser and quite fact-heavy course, in which my emphasis was primarily on effective instruction that stimulated students to integrate large amounts of conceptually difficult material. In this way I've come to realize the value of flexibility in teaching style (and to implement this more effectively in terms of student choice), and the ways in which students' learning needs may change depending on the nature of the material being taught.

My experience teaching several different courses has emphasized to me the vital role of feedback and self-assessment in continued improvement throughout my teaching career, and I am dedicated to the continual process that is self-improvement. I plan to continue to achieve my own goals by formulating strategies to improve my sensitivity to multiple learning styles, interpersonal mediation in classroom discussion, and my provision of the structure and rigor essential to fostering an atmosphere of creativity and engagement. These goals, in addition to and as distinct from those related to initiative and creativity in material presentation and inter-student communication, are vital to success in the classroom. I look forward to the opportunity to discover new ways of promoting student learning in an atmosphere of intellectual enthusiasm.