Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I was first introduced to the field of social psychology during my sophomore year of college. I signed up for the course to fulfill a general education requirement and because I was tossing around the idea of changing my major from forensic chemistry to psychology. This one course ended up changing the entire trajectory of my career (and life) thanks to my professor, Dr. Todd McElroy. Since then, I have created and molded my own approach to conveying knowledge to others. I have developed and currently utilize three key pillars to successful teaching. First, I keep my classroom current, both in terms of the technology I use and the substance I teach. Second, I discuss concepts not in isolation, but with a focus on the bigger relational picture, applying the concepts to everyday life. Finally, I teach students to become critical consumers of psychology as a science.

Staying Current

Utilizing technology in the classroom can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. For example, some students may be hesitant to share their thoughts on a topic in front of a large classroom, however, using the internet and/or other software, those students can more comfortably interact with the rest of the class. One example of this is my use of Twitter inside and outside of the classroom. I often have students tweet about the day's topic using an assigned hashtag (e.g., #Milgram, #LilAlbert). Students then receive class participation credit for these tweets. This method of assessing participation offers many benefits over the traditional minute paper approach in which students spend one-minute writing down their thoughts on a topic and then turn them in for participation. First, because students are limited to one tweet, they must be more concise and thoughtful in their responses. In addition, the public nature of their responses leads to more effort from the students and increased discussion not only among students in the course but also among their peers outside of the course. I often reply to students' tweets and/or post articles and sites related to points or questions they posed, which often starts a discussion between students outside of class that sometimes even carries over into the next class meeting.

Another technology I use to get students participating is Poll Everywhere (polleverywhere.com). This software allows me to create interactive polls that I can then download as PowerPoint slides to use in my classroom. I have used this in conjunction with *Brain Games* (which I will discuss more in the following section) as well as other class discussion activities. For example, when discussing definitions of aggression, I have students

pair up and [create their own definition of aggression](). They are then asked to use that definition of aggression to determine if 10 different scenarios would qualify as acts of aggression. Students also share their [responses via a live poll]() that we then use when discussing the scenarios as a class. This makes it easy for the class to see how different individuals classify acts as aggressive/non-aggressive and leads to interactive and enthusiastic conversations. When students can clearly see that half of the class has a different opinion than themselves, discussion inevitably follows.

Regarding the content of my courses, I regularly incorporate new and interesting research findings to keep my material as current as possible. Psychology can be a fast-changing area of study, so it is important to keep abreast of new research and theory. For me, this sometimes means simply adding the results of a new study or discussion of a new theory to my lecture. For example, in my social psychology course we discuss research on how violent video games are related to aggression. Given new research that demonstrates some of the positive outcomes associated with video games, I have added in a [section]() (and [video]()) where we discuss these positive effects as well. It is important for students to see that the field is constantly changing with researchers revising theories and sometimes abandoning them altogether.

I also regularly incorporate current media reports in a few different ways. First, I use Twitter to share current articles with my students. Often, these articles are [directly related to a topic]() that we have just discussed in class. This allows students to easily see how the research we are discussing in class is reported by the media and exerts an actual effect on their day-to-day lives. Other times, the [articles]() will not be directly related to concepts we have discussed, but might instead relate to how the media reports on psychology findings or psychological research that relates to students' lives more generally. Another way that I incorporate current media reports is with in-class activities aimed at evaluating these reports.

The Big Picture and Application

One of the beauties of teaching psychology is how easily the material relates to everyday life. However, students sometimes struggle with making that connection. Much of the focus of my exams is on the application of concepts and not on rote memorization of definitions. Therefore, I utilize many different techniques to help students see how these topics and concepts relate to their day-to-day experience and how to identify concepts in example situations.

One way I encourage students to explore how concepts relate to their personal lives is with "psychology in action" papers in my social psychology course. These papers require students to choose two topics that we have discussed in class and produce examples from their own lives of these concepts in action. This activity encourages students to think about these topics not in isolation but in relation to the everyday experience of being human. In addition, discussing explicitly how an example fits with a specific concept allows students to test their knowledge and ensure they understand the concept.

Clips from TV shows and movies are also a great way to allow students to see psychological concepts in action. I use this technique in every course that I teach. Students are watching these shows and movies outside of class for fun, and so when I bring them into an educational environment and show them how they exemplify the concepts we are discussing, it significantly enhances their retention of information. For example, when discussing the contact hypothesis, I use clips from the movie Remember the Titans to show how all features of the contact hypothesis must be present to reduce group prejudice. As other examples, I use a clip from Friends to discuss the altruism versus egoism debate, a clip of a simulation of schizophrenia to discuss the symptomology of this disorder, and clips of dancers in my statistics courses to demonstrate difficult statistical concepts in a more visual and unique manner. Students not only enjoy watching these clips because they are entertaining but also because they bring the topics we are discussing to life and illuminate how psychology is present everywhere.

One of my favorite ways to use application in the classroom is with activities and games. When students can actively experience a psychological concept, it helps them to understand and remember that information. Sometimes this can be achieved using a simple activity. For example, before I discuss the effect of groups in social psychology, I have students anonymously answer the question, "Imagine you could be invisible for one whole day; what would you do?" and turn in their responses to me. Later in that section's lecture, I show students the common responses from the class. Inevitably, responses involve things most students would never do if they were visible (e.g., lying, cheating, stealing), which leads into a great discussion about the effects of deindividuation. Activities like this can get students thinking about and discussing topics in a more active and approachable manner.

Games are also a great way to get students excited about a topic. For instance, I use episodes of the TV show *Brain Games* in both my Social Psychology and Introduction to

Psychology courses to get students actively involved with concepts. When discussing social judgments, we watch the *You Decide* episode of *Brain Games* as a class. I have created worksheets to go along with the episodes so that students are actively participating and not just passively observing. As students watch the episode, they "play along" on their worksheet. In addition, at certain points in the episode, they are asked to share their responses via Poll Everywhere. This allows me to switch between the episode and PowerPoint and easily display responses for everyone to see. This is a great way to show psychological concepts in action and demonstrate how these "brain games" work for most individuals.

Psychology as a Science

Finally, it is important to educate students of psychology about the strong scientific foundation of the field. Students should understand that psychology is a science and learn to be effective consumers of science. When discussing research methods in Introduction to Psychology, I spend a significant amount of time discussing this fact with students. In addition, students complete an activity that begins to introduce them to the skills that scientists in the field of psychology use.

As another example, in the psychological science senior capstone, student begin to implement their knowledge of psychology into an individual research project. This is an opportunity for students to take their knowledge of psychology as a science out of the classroom and experience it. In Spring of 2019, I individually worked with five students on six different projects that were presented at NCUR and in Fall of 2019, I had ten students in the course, four of which I worked with individually on their projects that will be presented at GURP in 2020. This is a great chance for students to get hands-on experience as scientists and learn useful skills that they can take with them into graduate school or careers.

Together, these three pillars of effective teaching (staying current, focusing on the big picture and application, and focusing on psychology as a science) have and continue to guide my instruction of students. I always review feedback from students obtained through course evaluations to determine changes I can make to achieve these goals more effectively. In addition, I routinely attend professional development workshops and seminars to learn new techniques and tips for being the most effective educator I can be.