

*2018 Donald N. Dedmon Distinguished Teaching Professor Award Portfolio*

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I am honored to be nominated for the Donald N. Dedmon Distinguished Teaching Professor Award. Below are my teaching narrative, numerical and written student evaluations, and letters of support.

My philosophy regarding effective teaching is based on the premise that students must develop curiosity about the learning process, a strong knowledge base, and the ability to acquire and apply knowledge in non-classroom settings. These goals are best met when students become active participants in the learning process. Consequently, the strategies I employ in the classroom, my office, and my lab are designed to stimulate interest and promote the acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills through active learning. I was trained as both a scientist and practitioner and am fortunate to be able to incorporate my clinical and research experiences into my teaching.

There are many approaches to effective teaching, and I use considerably different techniques in my graduate classes (N = 5-10) than I do in my undergraduate classes (N= 60-107). In PSYC 470 History of Psychology, for example, I have developed numerous demonstration activities to provide concrete examples that facilitate students' understanding of abstract, yet important, concepts such as (a) Plato's theory of forms, (b) Galileo's distinction between primary and secondary qualities and how this influenced the emergence of psychology as a scientific discipline, (c) experimental techniques used by psychophysicists and how these are related to Freud's notion of the unconscious, and (d) different approaches used to measure intelligence in the German rationalist versus British empiricist traditions. Such demonstrations help students understand and remember important concepts which have shaped the development of psychology as a science.

In PSYC 439 Abnormal Psychology, (N = 70-80), I created four writing assignments that encourage students to examine and challenge stigma related to mental health. They first write about someone they know who has been teased, bullied, or made fun of because of a mental illness. Next, they write anonymously about a time when they either actively or passively enjoyed a laugh at, made fun of, or bullied someone with a mental illness. They then reflect upon barriers that prevent good citizens from defending such individuals and what aspects of their own personality may or may not make it difficult for them to step up in this way. Finally, students describe a recent situation in which they observed unkind behavior toward someone with a mental illness, comment on their emotional reactions and behavior in response to it, and state what they have learned about themselves and about mental health stigma. At times, I have been brought to tears by the cruelty some students report having committed and the shame they now feel, such as the student who described bullying a peer to the point of hospitalization for a suicide attempt. Nonetheless, I also am heartened by the transformative changes I observe for many students across the semester in their understanding of themselves and in their compassion for individuals with mental illness.

In my smaller Sexual Assault class with graduate students from psychology, counselor education, criminal justice, nursing, and social work, I use group discussions to critically examine complex and controversial issues such as (a) how the legal system should define child sexual abuse, (b) what is wrong with sex between children and adults, (c) the use of anti-androgen therapy (i.e., chemical castration) in the treatment of adult sex offenders, and (d) pros and cons of posting sex offender registries on the internet. After formulating and discussing their own opinions in one class, they then read a scholarly article about the topic for the next class. Students can thus examine how their own views are consistent or inconsistent with those of professionals in the field. I also encourage students to apply what they are learning to current events by having them read and discuss professional documents, such as the Grand Jury Report regarding Jerry Sandusky and the Penn State Scandal. I have yet to figure out exactly how I am going to include the overwhelming

number of current events regarding sexual harassment and assault that have occurred in the past year alone, but I will! By the end of the semester students have read two books, approximately 35 scholarly articles, and examined the websites of key professional organizations that will serve as excellent resources for information long after they have left the university. Over the past 19 years, I have trained numerous graduate students, many of whom remain in the region, about state-of-the-art techniques for treating individuals who have experienced sexual victimization. It is very rewarding to know that my research informs my teaching and that many of my students will positively impact treatment services for individuals who have been sexually victimized in our community.

I take student feedback seriously. Each year I modify my courses based on student comments and my own assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the course. Almost immediately after each class, I update my notes or generate new examples or handouts. My strengths as a teacher are probably best reflected in the letters I receive from graduates and the comments I receive in my course evaluations. Students typically comment on the significant amount of knowledge they have gained and on my a) enthusiasm for teaching, b) high standards, (c) commitment to helping students, (d) clear organization of course material, (e) interesting and thought-provoking discussions, (f) use of helpful examples and classroom demonstrations, and (g) role as a mentor.

I expect students to work hard and do their best, and thus I constantly reiterate the importance of reading assigned material in advance, using class time effectively, taking quality notes, learning effective study habits and techniques, and taking responsibility for their own academic success. However, I also find that many students are ill-prepared for the rigors of college, and thus I spend numerous hours working one-on-one with students in my office helping them learn the skills necessary to succeed. During these meetings, we carefully review their notes and tests to accurately determine why they are struggling. Different problems require different solutions. Students often say "I'm just a bad test taker", but this attribution implies that there is nothing they can do to improve. We then discuss the wide variety of reasons that students experience difficulties. In most cases, after assessing students' notes and study habits we jointly determine that they are not in fact "bad test-takers" but rather have ineffective study techniques. We then identify strategies (e.g., better organization of notes, use of notecards) to help them become better students. Although these one-on-one meetings are very time-consuming, students are usually very grateful because they learn more effective strategies about how to take an active role in their learning and success. I always am delighted when students contact me after graduation to say thank you and to inform me that the content and rigor of my classes greatly prepared them to meet the demands of their graduate programs or careers in mental health.

One of my most effective teaching strategies is to involve both undergraduate and graduate students in my program of research. Participation in research stimulates curiosity and excitement about acquiring and sharing knowledge, and it helps students develop necessary professional skills. Throughout my career, I have made a concerted effort to continue my own scholarship and train and mentor students. I have published 26 articles, serve on the Editorial Board for the journal *Child Maltreatment*, and am the Director for the Center for Gender Studies at RU. Projects with student collaborators have resulted in nine co-authored publications and numerous conference presentations. Such professional exposure provides them with valuable experience and greatly enhances their likelihood of acceptance into graduate programs. In both the classroom and in the lab, I require a great deal from my students. I expect them to work up to their potential, and I provide them with as much support, help, and encouragement as is necessary for them to succeed.

In summary, my teaching, research, and professional service activities are interconnected and an integral part of my identity as a teacher. I find these activities incredibly rewarding and am confident that they fuel the enthusiasm and dedication I bring to my teaching, both in and out of the classroom.