Teaching Statement

Although I graduated from a large land-grant university, I began my undergraduate career at a small liberal arts college. There, I learned the value of individualized instructor attention, with professors checking in on my wellbeing and ensuring I performed to the best of my ability. Unfortunately, that sort of attention, possible in a seminar of twenty-five, came with a tuition fee too large for my family to afford; therefore, I understand some of the struggles—particularly financial—that students can face. Still, when I transferred to a university ten times the size, I knew it was important to find—and form—my own communities: I sought out professors in office hours, made friends with graduate students, and joined a research lab where the PI worked closely with undergraduate researchers. My gratitude for these mentors, even at an institution where many complained of feeling "lost", stuck with me in my own pedagogical training and provided assurance that I want to create those communities in my own instructional practice.

Guiding Philosophies

In my classes, I emphasize the students' role as critical thinkers. I am trained in the Socratic method of instruction from my time as a tutor with high-risk teenagers and take that approach to my lectures and seminars as well: reflecting student questions with scaffolded inquiry to help them come to the conclusion themselves. Furthermore, since many students report learning better by doing, I embrace a progressivist philosophy—one in which the student, rather than the instructor, is the center of the learning environment. Psychology is, of course, a study of people, and I often remind the students that includes them. As part of this, I have actively worked to expand my own knowledge of effective in-class learning tools, as well as to make them more integral to my courses. For example, after taking a workshop on the use of writing as a teaching tool, I started incorporating more "minute-papers" (short personal written reflections on a topic relevant to class) and think-pair-share discussion topics. In order to make the lectures more personally relevant, students may reflect on real-life applications of a theory or take short self-report measures before coming together as a class to discuss. Other times I integrate online tools of learning, such as the Parable of the Polygons to demonstrate institutional discrimination, or Kahoot! quizzes to provide comprehension checks and gather student opinions. In addition to providing rich learning opportunities, these online activities are often the students' favorites. Still other times we run experiments in class. On the first day of my social psychology class, before anything else, I have my students complete a Big Five personality inventory of their impressions of me. Later, I calculate these scores, as well as my own self-report, and we use them to discuss impression formation.

Perhaps most central to my instructional philosophy is a deep belief in critical pedagogy, a style of teaching that encourages students to question long-held assumptions about dominance and value in society. The study of psychology is often one of power, discrimination, violence, and hierarchy. Indeed, my own research touches on these themes as well. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that equal opportunity does not necessarily yield equity. To improve my own awareness of these issues, I have taken part in a workshop on inclusive pedagogy and I am currently enrolled in an eight-week online course on the barriers faced by students with disabilities. As a result, I updated my syllabus for the most recent course I taught, Health Psychology, to incorporate an inclusive classroom policy. The policy is meant to be a code of conduct for difficult discussions among classmates, but it also lays out a blueprint for my own policies regarding class discussions: 1) to prioritize the voices and experiences of marginalized

students, 2) to be mindful of the power dynamics in the room that may encourage some to speak but not others, and 3) to encourage further discussion in office hours or outside class should a student need extra support.

For many college students, equity—or the lack thereof—presents as a financial burden, as well. I know too well the strain of the cost of an undergraduate degree; therefore, I work to create a fiscally inclusive classroom. To that end, I use free, online Kahoot! quizzes rather than costly iClickers. Moreover, textbooks can act as a financial barrier: according to one survey, a majority of students (85%) report delaying or skipping the purchase of a textbook, largely due to cost (VitalSource, 2017). After receiving similar student feedback in my own courses, I decided to assign freely available scholarly articles rather than a textbook in my Health Psychology class. I would even consider open textbooks for larger introductory classes, from sources such as Noba or OpenStax.

Undergraduate Mentoring

While in graduate school, I have personally mentored 24 research assistants (RAs) between two labs. Five of these RAs were students of mine first, joining the lab to extend their understanding of the principals we covered in lecture. Another five completed their undergraduate honor's theses with me, which requires completion of a full scientific project from data collection to a final publication-quality manuscript. Many of the above pedagogical principals apply to my mentoring style as well: I use the Socratic method to train RAs on study protocols, provide scaffolded demonstrations for using psychophysiological technology, and do my best to ensure a welcoming and inclusive lab environment. In addition to my personal supervision over those RAs who help me with my projects, I also run our larger lab meetings every fall, which include the undergraduates who work on all the projects in the lab. These occur once a month, during which I put together topics or trainings appropriate for the students' needs or their place in their educational development. One semester, almost all of our RAs were either juniors or seniors planning on applying to graduate school; therefore, I organized a three-workshop series on the process of applying. Other semesters we have run statistical workshops or conducted literature reviews. No matter the activity, I approach these meetings, and their experience in the lab more generally, as professional development opportunities for the RAs. It is important that they leave the lab not only with course credit, but with tangible skills, no matter what they decide to do next.

Conclusion

I know first-hand the benefits of attending an institution that cares deeply about its students' success and personal development. I also know from my time at larger universities that one can make a community for themselves and those around them if one is sensitive and deliberate in how one treats the members therein. I consider my classrooms and my lab to be those communities. I also fervently believe that this sort of environment is crucial to fostering the critical inquiry that is expected from students at the collegiate level. My success in so doing is reflected in my consistently excellent teaching evaluations and the fact that a number of students wanted to continue their studies with me from the lecture hall to the lab.