David Johnson
Teaching Statement

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is guided by two major goals. The first is to ensure that my instruction provides both academic growth and arouses student enthusiasm. I want students to understand *and* be excited about the widespread implications of psychology to their daily lives. The second is to teach students how to think like scientists. I want to help students develop critical thinking skills so that they become careful consumers of scientific research.

To achieve these goals, I employ teaching methods that give students first-hand exposure to research. This includes having students read primary texts on their own and then unpacking those texts in class. This method has several benefits. First, it shows students that research is a process and not just a list of facts. They learn how researchers studied a specific question and can see the strengths and limitations of their work. Second, it requires students to engage with research. During class I ask them to generate hypotheses, predict results, and derive conclusions. Finally, this approach prepares students to think critically about the research they encounter in their everyday lives. Rather than accepting it at face value, my approach helps students evaluate the quality of the work and the appropriateness of its conclusions.

My assignments also foster student learning and interest. At several points, I ask students to apply the concepts, theories, and techniques they learned from class to their own life. For example, students have used social influence techniques to explain how companies market products. This approach helps them see first-hand how psychology is relevant to them. One student in my 2015 Introductory Psychology class wrote, "Looking deeper into concepts of psychology gives me a sense of satisfaction. I feel like I'm making sense of the different thought patterns that go through my mind on an everyday basis." There are also empirical benefits to asking students to relate class concepts to their lives; relating material to the self increases retention of that material (Symons & Johnson, 1997).

Finally, I use a variety of teaching methods to ensure that students learn class material. For example, when teaching about memory, I integrate my lecture with an in-class activity (asking students to recall a penny), videos on false memory, and guidelines on best practices for studying. The reason for this approach is two-fold. First, past work has shown that students learn material better when it is shown repeatedly, especially in different formats (deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002). Second, changing activities slows declines in student attention. (Bligh, 1998). I take my role as an instructor seriously, and am constantly looking for evidence-based methods to improve student interest and learning.

Teaching Experience

In the summer of 2015 I taught an introductory psychology course. I was excited to teach a small section (25 students), which allowed me to engage the whole class. I structured my course from an evolutionary perspective in order to bridge the various topics I covered, including sensation and perception, learning, memory, development, emotions, motivation, psychological disorders,

and therapy. I put a great deal of effort into preparing and teaching the class, and this showed in my teaching evaluations. Table 1 breaks down my evaluations into five categories and compares them to past introductory psychology classes. My students' enthusiasm was also evident in their open-ended comments: "It was really a great class. I generally rate highly but in this case I wish there was a higher level to grade to because this was a good class" and in their appreciation of my teaching style "I thought my professor was really thorough in teaching."

Table 1.
Instructor Evaluations for Introductory Psychology Compared to University Averages

| | Introductory Psychology Instructor Ratings | | University Average for Introductory Psychology | | |
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*Z*
Instructor Involvement	3.47	0.80	2.94	0.70	0.76
Student Interest	3.21	0.92	2.64	0.37	1.54
Student-Instructor Interaction	3.35	0.91	2.62	0.71	1.02
Course Demands	3.07	1.08	2.48	0.40	1.47
Course Organization	3.30	0.92	2.79	0.42	1.21

Note. Ratings are made on a 5-point scale and have been reversed so that: 5 = Superior, 4 = Above Average, 3 = Average, 2 = Below Average, 1 = Inferior. *Z* is the standardized difference between obtained ratings and psychology department average. University averages are based on 166 classes from 1996 - 2016. Instructor ratings are based on 16 students.

I have also been a laboratory instructor for two sections of a research methods class. This class covered the fundamentals of psychological measurement, research design, and causal inference. I taught students how to design studies, analyze data with statistical software, and write up their results in APA style. I also helped the students complete an end of semester project that required them to apply these skills. In a similar vein, I have guest-lectured for a large, 300-person Social Psychology class (three times), and facilitated an online course of 48 students. This latter course taught me how to interact with students over an online medium.

In addition to my teaching experience, I also completed a formal course for graduate students designed to improve my skills as an instructor. The course used evidence-based practices to train us on how to create useful syllabi, deliver effective lectures, handle student interactions, foster class discussion, employ active learning strategies, and design fair tests. The class included a formal evaluation of our teaching by the instructor. Here is an excerpt of some of his comments on my Introductory Psychology class:

> *You are doing a very nice job of teaching – I would think your students appreciate the effort that is clearly evident in the way you have organized and present material and the enthusiasm you have in teaching. I enjoyed being in your class!*

Finally, I also served as a teaching assistant for several undergraduate courses: Social Psychology, Personality Psychology, Introductory Psychology, and Research Methods, and one graduate course: Quantitative Research Design and Analysis. These experiences gave me additional experience grading, leading review sessions, and conveying information to students.

Based on my teaching experiences and research interests, I look forward to teaching classes such as: Introductory Psychology, Research Methods, Introductory Statistics, Social Psychology, Personality Psychology, and Evolutionary Psychology. I am also excited to teach courses on more targeted topics and analytical skills, such as Stereotyping and Prejudice, Social Cognition, Bayesian Statistics, and Computational Modeling.

Mentoring Experience

> *Thank you so much for all of your help over the past two years. Whether it was getting grad school advice or working on my project, I knew I could always count on you for guidance and encouragement. You've been a great mentor and friend.*

I have a cabinet in my office covered with thank you cards from students I have mentored, many that express similar sentiments as this one. As a member of a large laboratory, I have mentored dozens of undergraduates. Many of these students are now graduate students themselves, including the student above who is completing a clinical PsyD. I have been involved in nearly every part of their lab experience, including lab meetings, scheduling, training, helping them apply to graduate schools, and completing independent research projects.

I take an active role in developing these students and consider them vital members in the research process. For example, this year I helped three students complete year-long independent research projects where they designed and ran their own study. I also make considerable efforts to collaborate with undergraduate students on my own work. Currently, I am working with three undergraduates to conduct a nationwide survey on officer-involved shootings. This huge project involves mailing 700 letters to departments across the country and documenting their responses. These students have worked on the project for a year now, and I will include them as authors on the manuscript.

For the past three summers I also mentored four students through Michigan State's McNair program. This intensive two-month program is funded through the National Science Foundation and gives underrepresented students the opportunity to get research experience they could not obtain at their home institution. As a mentor, I had close daily interactions with these students, helping them read articles, create experimental materials, collect data, and analyze results. All my mentees presented their finished projects at local conferences. They found the experience rewarding: "Thanks for your mentorship this summer. I've learned so much about the research process and what it's like to be a grad student from you;" "I appreciate all the time you spent working with me this summer. You've challenged me to grow in all aspects of my discipline."

Summary

I believe that students are motivated by more than just mastery of subject material; they also want to be excited about what they learn. As an instructor, my role is to meet both of those wants. I am eager to do this in both a classroom setting and in more individual settings as a mentor. My teaching and mentoring experiences as well as my formal research training have taught me the skills necessary to achieve these goals. I look forward to the opportunity to help develop students and further improve my skills as a teacher and mentor.