

Teaching Philosophy Brenda Russell

As a teacher, I understand that each student brings their own interests and ambitions to the classroom. Therefore it is necessary to get to know what drives each one so that I can motivate them to achieve success. I believe passion is a gateway to learning, as excitement and drive often follow effortlessly. Helping students identify their passions, strengths and goals opens up new and clearer paths forward that lead to a degree of self-determination. This can be empowering and intrinsically motivating. Once their path or niche is discovered, academic success often follows.

I consider myself a facilitator and mentor of this discovery process and as such I become a productivity and accountability coach who expects much from myself and my students. I offer assignments that encourage students to let their passion guide their exploration of topics facing our community while equipping them with the necessary tools to make tangible differences.

Each semester, I address contemporary issues that touch student lives. Students write journals, reflections, and create materials for their websites and career portfolios. Digital knowledge is essential to increase internship and career marketability. Therefore, Introduction to Internship (PSY296) students build their own websites (ePortfolio) that include bios, resumes, mission statements and goal statements. These are updated throughout the internship and capstone courses to include writing samples along with examples of internship and research experience. Similarly, senior capstone students (PSY496) create LinkedIn websites and business cards to prepare them for future careers. Students also prepare for internships by refining interview skills and practicing strategies that promote ethical behaviors.

Additionally, students can expect to be challenged by real-world legal and ethical analyses. We address societal mores and values in the workplace and beyond. We discover that what is 'ethical' or 'lawful' often provides a minimum standard of behavior, or find that in some circumstances what is lawful may contradict our personal ethics. I encourage students to identify their values and beliefs and strive to rise above minimum standards of behavior. For instance, in my PSY496 course we go into considerable depth covering the APA code of ethics, and students write a paper on an ethical issue they encountered during one of their internships. I also invite an expert on APA ethics to speak with students in this course every semester. For their final projects, students complete a grant-writing proposal in which they use all of their research skills to identify a social problem and create a solution, such as a program, treatment or intervention and a design to measure effectiveness. For example, students have created proposals designed to better assist veterans with vision problems, understand the cognitive ramifications of concussions in school sports, or created programs designed to service 'at risk' teens and reduce delinquency. Similarly, Forensic Psychology and Sexual and Domestic Abuse classes are designed to teach students how psychology and criminal justice are connected and ultimately affect all aspects of students' lives. Students are encouraged to go to court, engage in mock trials, jury-selection exercises, debates, and attend ride-alongs with local law enforcement agencies, and these experiences are integrated into class discussions.

In expecting more from myself, I understand that I am accountable for my own teaching, and I must self-reflect and rely on consistent data-driven assessment to bring achievement gaps to light. Once those gaps are revealed I consistently adapt my courses to improve instruction. My ability to share this as a personal mentor to other classroom leaders who guide tomorrow's scholars has been an honor and a privilege. I have mentored five faculty members (3 FT1 and 2 tenure track), and one of my mentees was recently awarded with the Atherton Teaching Award. I make myself available to my colleagues whenever I am needed, whether to discuss teaching or program coordination related issues, expand networks or simply provide encouragement. I get to know their interests and ambitions so I can help them succeed as professionals. The best part of these interactions is that they are a learning experience for both of us.

As a teacher and mentor of self-discovery, I hope to convey how my own path led me to do what I love every day. I expect more from my students because I truly hope that one day their passion will drive them to rise above the minimum standards and find their own success as they make tangible differences in our world. I expect more from myself because I truly care about their success and recognize that students can reach a higher potential when we as teachers rise above minimum standards of teaching and mentoring.