Statement of Teaching Philosophy

David A. Townsend

My lifelong devotion to learning across a wide array of disciplines and contexts has shaped my approach as an instructor of Psychology classes. I view it as my responsibility not only to make the core curriculum of the courses I teach highly accessible to the students, but also to provide them with the methodology, the resources, and the skills that will facilitate learning and stimulate them to recognize and think critically about related problems they encounter outside the classroom. Thus, while insisting that the students in my classes acquire a fundamental understanding of Psychology as a scientific and historical discipline, I structure my classes so that mastery of the material provides the essential scaffolding that will enable them to engage in reflective questioning and successful intellectual pursuits outside of the formal academic setting.

To achieve these objectives, I strive to create an enjoyable and novel classroom experience. I strive to make the curriculum flexible, interactive, and interrelated by exploiting fully all of the technological and social media advances available to today's collegiate instructor. I have had great success using *me-first* buzzers along with a Jeopardy style PowerPoint game during exam review classes to increase the involvement of undergraduate students and tap into students natural competitive natures. Additionally, I strive to remain cognizant of individual student needs, learning styles, and time management issues. For students having difficulty with college level material I have found that instructor availably and time along with review sessions and positive feedback to be a fruitful teaching strategy. For high achieving students, not only do I provide extra readings and opportunities in all of my classes but I also provide the scaffolding and enthusiastic atmosphere to become more involved in their Psychology education through internships, research and laboratory work, Honors projects, and attendance to professional meetings. Finally, I strive to make the course material applicable to real life situations.

One of the major difficulties that instructors encounter in lecture classes is engaging the students in the learning process and maintaining their interest in it. To overcome this problem, I go to great lengths to "bring to life" the textbook and lecture

material. For example, I have classically conditioned my students using balloons and 'nerf' cannons, dismantled the classroom heating system to manipulate habituation, have gotten students to instrumentally condition one another with peppermint-patty rewards, and have even had students construct paper animals using the parameters of current mathematical learning theories. Each lecture includes not only the textbook material and my PowerPoint slides, but also online and real-time games, streamed video and music elucidating novel subject material, a current experimental article on the class web page that can be reviewed for extra credit, summary and definition sheets with links to cogent web sites, and optional worksheets.

During each lecture, I pause every 20 minutes to solicit questions and feedback, although I encourage students to interrupt me and participate during class. I have found that maintaining a class web page on which the class information and study material are available far in advance of scheduled lectures is conducive to students learning at their own pace and attacking complex concepts from multiple vantages. In addition, use of a moderated bulletin board on the web for my classes has allowed the students to exchange ideas, help one another, and supplement classroom learning on their individual schedules.

The core experiments and theories that make up the Psychology canon are often perceived by students as dense, esoteric, and difficult to grasp. I think it is important to provide students with an example or demonstration of how the principle documented in each experiment or addressed in each hypothesis could be applied to situations that are more familiar in the student experience. To this end, I have had students envision my lectern as a frat house bar, transform dorm rooms into imaginary Skinner's boxes, and I have created a gambling casino out of audio-visual equipment. Additionally, I think it essential to provoke student thought and discussion about how a given scientific principle might be applied to situations that students will encounter throughout their lives-- at work, at home, in social settings, and elsewhere.

Finally, I relish learning and learn something new every time I teach. As Joseph J'ouvert (1803) expressed it: "To teach is to learn twice." I fervently hope to infuse each and every one of my students with the joy and excitement of discovery also.