

Teaching Philosophy

I believe teaching is a means by which one can achieve the following purposes:

- Communicate the interconnectedness of humanity
- Convey knowledge of specific course content
- Develop life-long learners
- Provide a vision for the future

My vision for teaching is to emphasize to students the common bonds among members of the human community. I believe emphasizing similarity rather than differences among people is the key to improving relationships on a personal, as well as, a societal level. When experiences in and out of the classroom can illuminate the fact that humans share the same characteristics, feelings, and behaviors, a step is taken in reducing biases and preconceptions. Through this awareness of similarity, I hope for students to, at a minimum, come to appreciate diversity among people and be empathic to the plight of their fellow human beings. I believe psychology is an excellent vehicle to achieve this goal.

Conveying specific course content is central to teaching. The means by which one conveys this information is very important. By making material personally relevant and compelling for students, they begin to engage in critical thinking. To enhance the process of developing critical thinking skills, it is important for students to examine their beliefs and surroundings and apply theories and concepts to their own lives and social surroundings. In addition, critically examining scientific research in a specific subfield of the discipline can aid students in strengthening these skills as well as convey specific course content. It is important for students to understand the goals of psychology and the means by which information about human behavior is obtained. This basic understanding of the discipline provides them with the insight that human behavior is determined by many factors and only by knowing those factors can they truly appreciate their own experiences and the experiences of others.

With the development of critical thinking skills within the context of learning specific course content, students have a means by which they can become lifelong learners. Along with critical thinking skills an attitude of skepticism is fostered leading the individual to question themselves and their perceptions as well as information presented to them. This attitude of skepticism, hopefully, will lead them to continue to ask questions throughout their lives. With these skills, they have the ability to apply them to other disciplines, their own lives, and the world around them.

I believe that through teaching one can provide students with a vision of a brighter future both on a personal level and a broader, more global level. I would like students, when they leave this institution, to think about the possibilities for themselves and the world and have the skills to make the possibilities a reality and

to make positive contributions to society,

Instructional Philosophy and Techniques:

My educational objective in the classroom (both traditional and “virtual”) is to teach specific course content, develop critical thinking skills and apply those skills to a variety of format of information (specific course content, scientific research, popular media, and personal information) and inspire students to be lifelong learners. I believe the path to reach this goal is a proper order and time sequence, and a variety of instructional methods are available to attain this goal. I believe students need to have a clear understanding of what they can expect in a particular course in terms of course requirements and content to be learned (as reflected in my syllabi which are available upon request). One of the most effective in-class instructional methods I have found is using the Socratic method in class discussion. By challenging long-held beliefs in a non-confrontational manner, students begin to examine their thoughts and behaviors, and those of society. I believe this is the first step in developing critical thinking skills and becoming inspired to ask questions and seek answers. I then attempt to develop these skills with practice – asking them to think critically about scientific research. I believe it is important for students to have experience with primary sources of information associated with a particular topic area and in many courses I have students read scientific journal articles, summarize and critique them. In some courses, I try to develop these critical thinking skills through direct observation and “hands-on” experiences (e.g., child psychology).

In order to meet the needs of our students, I teach in a variety of forums. I have taught in a “traditional” classroom, at night, in a Directed study format, and in an “online” format. Each format has its advantages and challenges. The current trend of distance education has given me the opportunity to find ways of meeting the goals of education, developing critical thinking skills, and inspiring students to become lifelong learners. I have found that creating a course that as closely equates a traditional classroom as possible is a challenge but doable task using the technology available to us at Athens State University. Using Tech Smith Relay and PowerPoint as my lecture format has actually enhanced the way I can present course content. Although nothing can replace spontaneous classroom discussion, Blackboard provides a discussion board that can sometimes provide a format for students to give more thoughtful answers to questions posed than in the traditional classroom.