

**Statements of Teaching Philosophy
by 2017 Recipients**



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Teaching Philosophy

My primary goals as a teacher are to inspire my students to appreciate the joy of learning and to provide an environment for optimizing learning opportunities and outcomes. Our experiences suggest that most students are interested in a practical curriculum that focuses on results, modernity, and convenience. This is a major teaching challenge in today's hectic world. The complexities and interrelated nature of modern business practice call for an integrated learning approach to management education. One teaching strategy that we utilize is based on the Instructional Management System initiative. This initiative, which is geared towards higher education, is designed to promote systematic thinking, to improve learning outcomes, and to increase return on instructional investments. Specific principles of this initiative are: 1) Education involves more than a single course; 2) A course is more than content; 3) Content is more important than lecture notes; 4) Convenience is important, and 5) Quality assurance requires an integrated learning approach. We have implemented these principles throughout our courses including the increased use of Internet resources to promote integrated learning.

A second teaching strategy that we employ is the E-Learning Success Model. This model suggests that overall learning effectiveness depends on the attainment of success at each of three stages: content design, content delivery, and learning outcomes. Our teaching philosophy embodies all three stages. Pepperdine's Sakai Learning Management System provides the platform for implementing this learning construct. We use web-based assessment rubrics for evaluating the performance at each stage of the process (e.g., Livetext). We have found that this interactive learning approach awakens each student's intellectual interests and stimulates them to think creatively and independently. For example, one class assignment, selected by some students, is to identify and develop a feasibility study for a new business opportunity using web-based assessment templates. This exercise has provided a vehicle for several students, over the years, to enter the marketplace. In the future, we are hopeful to introduce students to the recently announced Peate Entrepreneurial Institute where they can continue to develop their business ideas.

A major development, which occurred at the Graziadio School in 2013, was the deployment of Pepperdine's first online degree program (MBA). We were fortunate to have participated in the overall program design including working with the subcontractor. Engaging in a completely online program offers many new challenges including: 1) maintaining student engagement, 2) accommodating multiple time zones, and 3) ensuring consistent learning outcomes vis-a-vis our traditional programs. We have found that continued interaction with the students and team study

groups are two ways to overcome these natural challenges. To that end, most of the course materials are provided via Sakai. Specific examples include: voiceover PowerPoint lectures, cases, computing applets, homework examples and solutions, team case presentation samplers, practice quizzes, and supplemental reading materials. As a result, students can access course content through one convenient knowledge portal. This method of content delivery illustrates our approach to effectively organizing and presenting course material in a cogent and coherent manner. In this regard, we have an abiding interest in maintaining academic rigor both in our traditional and online programs. This is manifested using carefully designed lesson plans. As an example of rigor, our students are exposed to the standard business processes of best practices and benchmarking. We continue to stress the importance of tapping into the existing body of knowledge using Pepperdine's digital library. Recently we introduced the "flipped" learning model where the focus, both online and in the classroom, is on solving homework problems and engaging in team exercises. Many of the lectures have been record and thus are available to the students in an asynchronous setting.

During my 35-year tenure at Pepperdine we have strived to demonstrate good academic citizenship through service to the University and the larger community. Specifically, we continue to serve on a variety of committees and both inside and outside of Pepperdine (e.g., vice chairman INFORMS University Analytics Program). We maintain an active involvement with students outside of the classroom, including advising, counseling, and mentoring. We also regularly participate as a faculty representative at student recruitment and orientation events. Our student evaluations continue to be a source of great inspiration. Some recent specific student comments include: 1) "He is a great asset to Pepperdine. He is the reason I chose Pepperdine over other nearby schools", 2) "Really enjoyed Dr. Hall's teaching, his energy is very effective. His teaching enthusiasm is infectious", 3) "He has a genuine love for what he does and it makes you want to do better as a student and as a business employee. Every class I learned something new that was applicable in my real-life role and it also helped me see what I would like to contribute and learn about to be prepared for my new and upcoming career roles." My induction into the Beta Gamma Sigma (BGS) and Delta Mu Delta Honor societies underscores our commitment to academic rigor. We often serve at the BGS honors breakfast.

Our publication record emphasizes our ongoing commitment to scholarship particularly as it can be translated into the classroom. For example, over the past few years we have received several prize paper and presentation awards. The material contained in these papers and presentations has been used directly in the classroom (e.g., published cases). Additionally, we have had the opportunity to work with many of our colleagues on a variety of scholarly projects across multiple disciplines (e.g., the growing impact of shadow IT). Our scholarship also strengthens our ability to maintain mastery of the dynamically changing world of business analytics. To that end, we are currently in the process of implementing the Graziadio Virtual Learning Center. The initiative was funded from grants from the Office of the Provost and Central IT. This center will provide faculty and students access to the state in the art in learning technology and knowhow. We were recently honored by being appointed the Corwin D. Denney Academic Chair. One of the goals of this appointment is to apply artificial intelligence to improve the content and delivery of management education (e.g., intelligent tutors). Cloud based intelligent tutoring systems (ITS) provides the vehicle for the Graziadio School to offer world class management education, which is entrepreneurial in spirit, ethical in focus, and global in orientation. Enhancing the preparation of our students supports the notion that successful

management seeks collective good along with individual profit and is anchored in core values such as integrity, stewardship, courage, and compassion.

Pepperdine's mission and affirmation statements appear in our syllabi and are emphasized in class on a continuous basis. Specifically, our abiding passion is to create a learning environment consisting of academic excellence and value-centered education in which our students are prepared for lives of purpose, service, and leadership. In summary our basic teaching philosophy is designed around the following principles: to develop positive and supportive attitudes; to cultivate skills in problem solving and decision-making; to formulate an understanding of the interactive and dynamic nature of modern business practice especially considering the growing impact of globalization; to establish a clear understanding of the importance of treating others with courtesy and respect; and to inspire a values-centered approach to leadership and a life long commitment to the pursuit of excellence.

*Challenges are what make life interesting.
Overcoming them is what makes life meaningful!*
— Joshua J. Marine



Ted V. McAllister
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A Free Mind

What does it mean to be intellectually free?

A free mind is a bound mind in the same way that only in freedom can a person choose to follow Jesus. Only by freely choosing can we encounter the grace that lovingly binds us to our Lord and only when we are thus bound can we be free to be who we were meant to be. A free mind must be liberated from certain types of limitations so that it can be free to pursue its love: truth, beauty, and the permanent things. A mind enslaved by fear, trapped by ignorance, enfeebled by historical provincialism (presentism), and unformed by the structuring and empowering rules of logic, mathematics, analysis, can never hope to be free. A mind that has not been formed will not be bound to the proper object of her reflection and inquiry, but she will be trapped in a chaotic world that offers comfort through unexamined self-evident meanings.

The objective of an education is to help form the mind so that it may freely choose the object of its love, so that it is empowered to become what it was meant to be. Intellectual formation differs radically from ideological transformation—formation concerns empowering the mind to see for itself and transformation rests on an ideological conception of what kind of person we ought to produce. Formation concerns the proper mental furniture, the tools of thinking, the historical and intellectual perspective to produce humility about the self-evident truths of the power structure into which one is born. An education oriented around formation is teleological in the sense that it operates with conceptions of intellectual maturity. Transformation is, however, teleological in a different way as it aims at giving to the person the right ideas and concepts as defined by the illuminati of their age. Transformation does not prepare one to turn one's mind toward the time-bound and self-evident claims of one's intellectual climate, but to ape the moral, intellectual, and political fashions of one's age.

Transformation serves many purposes. A successful transformation prepares one to enter a commercial world versed in the beliefs, code-words, and self-evident assertions that are part of the social currency of a business environment. A successful transformation prepares one to act in politics by having a clear, circular, moral reasoning that governs political choices and determines to which tribe one belongs. A successful transformation supplies the psychic comfort that allows people to enter into both their private lives and engage in collective activities and causes. A transformed mind has the security of beliefs that need not be challenged.

But a transformed mind is not free. A free mind and an enslaved mind are both capable of sophistication and of enjoying the intellectual pleasures associated with education and erudition. It is often true, depending on circumstances, that an enslaved mind is more comfortable since it can enter and move smoothly through her society, having secured answers, by way of a closed system of ideology, to the most pressing moral, political and existential questions. Indeed, it is likely that a free mind will suffer more because she is bound to truth not fashion, to inquiry not certainty, and she views, through the sweep of historical perspective, the irony of the newest version of

righteousness. A free mind is free at a cocktail party or in a gulag. A free mind is immune from cant and moral posturing because she is bound to the permanent truths and the highest spiritual and intellectual pursuits that call her but never satisfy her. Eyes fixed on what she cannot possess fully, she lives in pursuit, but ever drawn to the fullness that life on earth cannot supply.

It is conventional in essays of this sort to write about how much I love my students and my field of study. I do. But there is a difference between loving and loving well. I learned long ago that my own education, my own intellectual formation, was poorly done and that I am in pursuit—headlong, passionate, and sometimes even reckless pursuit—of the truths and beauty that define my life as a scholar and teacher with many handicaps. Most of my students come equally or even more severely handicapped. They are addicted to abstractions that correspond to public opinion. They have rarely taken even rudimentary logic classes. Their knowledge of history—even their own nation's history—is often barely more than sweeping generalizations disconnected from empirical evidence. Yet, even after such educational malpractice, most come willing to think, to question, and even to suffer the spiritual turmoil of discovering that they know so very little about themselves.

And so, I invite my students to join me—another soul whose formative education produced great limitations—in asking the questions that give the life of the mind its vibrancy. The question, more than the answer, liberates us. Can we rethink something presumed answered? Can we pursue methods of analysis that will give us new ways of thinking about data? Dare we step outside of the provincialism of the present and grapple with the human complexity that only history supplies?

In short, I invite them to want to be free even if we all must struggle against the comfortable forces of conventional thinking, of fashionable moralizing, of self-evident claims about the good life. I ask them to be daring, but to learn the difference between being daring and reckless. I push them to see in complexity the beauty that simple abstractions cannot supply. I ask them if they are willing to challenge power with truth, to take down the precious and popular falsehood even if they cannot provide a ready alternative. I want them to be brave and hungry—brave in their struggle against power and hungry for truth.

In the process, I try to make myself a bit braver. In the end, I have only this to offer my students: the example of a man struggling to be free. They see and must see my failings, limitations, the peculiar blind-spots and the profound limitations of perspective that cling to me like so many chains. But it is this example of a searcher that I have to offer and this, at least, I offer completely and without fear or reservation.

James B. White
Professor of Organic Chemistry
Seaver College

The prospect of taking organic chemistry induces fear. Few if any students take organic chemistry of their own free will; they take it because their major, and the professional schools they hope one day to attend, require it. There is a lot at stake based on how well they do in the class. I empathize with my students' fears. Organic chemistry was the hardest course I took in college. The only C I've ever made in an academic course was in the first trimester of the yearlong organic chemistry sequence. I know what it is like to have always done well in school, but struggle in organic chemistry. At the same time, I fell in love with organic chemistry, and I stuck it out, raising my grades to a B and an A over the next two trimesters. I know that organic chemistry is hard, but I also know from personal experience that it is worth the struggle to succeed in it.

As I explain to students on the first day of class, they teach themselves organic chemistry. To be sure, a teacher either facilitates or hinders students' learning, but students ultimately learn organic chemistry through the effort they put into the course. I facilitate their learning by building an edifice in class of overlapping concepts combined with some required memorization. But the students have to build their own conceptual framework in order to make sense of organic chemistry; I just show them what it should look like and how it should work.

When I first came to Pepperdine, I lectured at a blackboard from handwritten notes. Each lecture was a race. I raced to get through all the material I needed to cover in a content-rich course, writing down as much detail as I thought necessary to explain the material to students. The students raced to try and keep up. In my third year at Pepperdine I had a breakthrough. I came to class one day with a handout based on my lecture notes for that day. The handout contained the words and many of the structures I would otherwise have written on the board. I projected the pages of the lecture handout onto a screen, explained in my own words what was written in the handout, and filled in the missing parts of the handout, which mostly involved drawing structures. That particular lecture was one that I knew from experience was both unusually hard for students to grasp and important for making sense of future lectures. The key to understanding and applying the lecture is the ability to do what I refer to in class as "mental gymnastics," the ability to see in three dimensions a structure drawn in two dimensions, and manipulate the two-dimensional representation by turning and flipping it in one's head while keeping the connectivity and spatial relationship of the atoms the same. By providing a handout with much of the material already written down, I bought time for the students so that they could concentrate on following the lecture, not on copying it down. That handout was a hit and over a period of several years I wrote a handout for every lecture and prelab lecture covered in CHEM 310/311. The handouts slow the pace of the lectures without reducing the content covered in the course. There is more time for students to ask questions and to have discussions on things that are not making sense during the lecture. Each year I revise each handout to some extent as I come up with new ideas for presenting material or better ways to express a concept. Each handout also has 5-20 problems, along with detailed answers to the problems at the end of each handout. Students download the handouts, and the collective handouts serve as the textbook for the class.

Being a father has helped me realize that I am a storyteller. This trait comes out in my lecturing, although the stories I tell in class are true, unlike the ones I made up for my children, and they have a point related to helping students understand and respect chemical reactivity. Many of these stories are based on my experiences in doing research, and as such they help to personalize the

chemistry covered in class. I also make free use of analogies to things outside of chemistry. For example, to emphasize that there is a *very big* difference between being weakly nucleophilic and not being nucleophilic at all, I explain that it is like the difference, as explained by Miracle Max in *The Princess Bride*, between being dead and being *mostly* dead. Mostly dead is a little bit alive, so there is still hope for some reactivity.

Every two or three years one of my students from organic chemistry goes off to graduate school to pursue a PhD in organic chemistry. These students represent about 1% of the students in my classes. As such, I often ask myself what the long-term benefit is to learning some organic chemistry for the other 99%. To be sure, organic chemistry is an important stepping stone to other courses students will take, the most immediate being biochemistry. Learning organic chemistry is necessary to understanding biological systems at the molecular level. However, I harbor no illusions that twenty years after taking organic chemistry that any of the students (besides those who earned a PhD in organic chemistry) will remember what a Diels-Alder reaction is. But there are some lessons, experiences and problem-solving skills that students learn that supersede knowledge of the content of the course. One lesson is that you don't really understand a concept unless you are capable of applying it to problems you haven't seen before. Indeed, demonstrating such an understanding is necessary for earning a B or an A in my courses. An important experience for students is recognizing which concepts among the many learned in class are applicable to a particular problem. And the ultimate problem-solving skill is how to take a big problem that cannot be solved directly, and break it down into smaller problems that can be solved sequentially. The skills involved in recognizing what is applicable to a problem and breaking a problem down into smaller problems is analogous to what physicians do when they diagnose the symptoms of their patients.

There are several additional characteristics that I strive for in my teaching.

- **Being well prepared:** Although I could do my lectures from memory, I spend an hour before each lecture reviewing the content of the handout. In doing this review, I consider how I am going to present the material in words and pictures, and also how I will relate it to past and future lectures.
- **Availability:** I keep my office door open whenever I am in my office, and students understand that they can ask for help anytime I am in my office other than the hour before a lecture. I am also prompt in answering students e-mails, including evenings and weekends.
- **Testing:** I believe that testing is a part of the teaching process, as a well-crafted exam both validates what a student understands and exposes what they don't. I write new exams each year so that students can keep their exams and use them as part of their preparation for the next exam, which is dependent on how well they did on previous exams. I provide three practice tests for each of the three exams taken during the semester and for the final exam. Prior to each exam I conduct a review session in which I go over two of the three practice tests, saving the third practice exam for students to do on their own as part of their final preparation for taking an exam. Writing new exams each year helps to keep me intellectually engaged in the subject matter by providing an outlet for my creativity. It also affects how I read the chemical literature. The obvious reason for keeping abreast of developments in one's field of scholarship is to inform one's research, but given the never-ending need for new exam problems, I also read the

literature with the view of finding material that is understandable to students taking an introductory course in organic chemistry, and weaving such material into test questions.

- Grading: I grade and return exams, which are comprised of short-answer questions, by the next class period. I believe that the more time that passes between taking an exam and getting it back, the less value it has in reinforcing what students know and more importantly helping them understand what they thought they knew, but still need to work on. In assigning grades, I don't use either a % scale or a curve. When I grade exams, I grade each exam from beginning to end, and I take notes. I keep track of how I assign partial credit to help insure that I grade the exams uniformly, and when I finish grading each exam, I assess how I think the student did on the exam. If, for example, they knew most of the factual material, such as the definition of terms and names of compounds, and also showed some ability to apply what they knew, then I assess that they earned a B on the exam. I then add up the number of points they scored on the exam and write a note, e.g. "76 is a B." To get an A, a student has to demonstrate even more of an ability to apply the course material in their answers. When I finish grading I have what my students refer to as the "curve," which is the range of scores that I judged were A grades, B grades, etc. I emphasize to students that they are not competing against each other, but against my expectations. There is no pre-determined distribution of grades as there was for the grading curves I faced when I was an undergraduate. I once had a small section of CHEM 310 in which nobody made an A, and at the other extreme I once had a section of CHEM 311 in which half the class made either an A or an A-.
- Recording of lectures: In 2013, I began recording my lectures and posting them online. This has not affected attendance of my lectures, which has always been high despite being optional, but it obviously is a help for students who miss class. It also is a help for students who attend class, as they can review the lecture after class, especially parts that they found most challenging. Seeing something presented more than once, and being able to pause the lecture to consider what was presented, is something many students find helpful.
- Problem sets: In the spring of 2014 while I was teaching CHEM 311 to a small group of students in London, I did an experiment in "flipping" the classroom. Since there were videos of the lectures from the previous year, I had students watch the lecture video before coming to class, and used class time to work problems. I thought it was a success, as did *most* of the students in the class, but I learned when I returned to Malibu that students were either indifferent to "flipping" the classroom for a science course, or strongly opposed. As a consequence, I didn't "flip" the classroom, but the problem sets I wrote in London were the start of writing a problem set for each lecture handout. These problem sets are more than just additional problems for students to do in addition to the problems in the lecture handouts. The problems in the problem sets are problems from old exams, something I was able to do because I write new exams each year. As I explain to students, the purpose of the problem sets is for students to make their mistakes before the exams, not on the exams. Like attending class, reading the lecture handouts and doing the problems in the lecture handouts, doing the problem sets is optional, as their grade is determined solely by how they do on the exams. However, like attending class, reading the lecture handouts and doing the problems in them, doing the problem sets should help them do better on the exam. Students get their problem sets corrected either in person by bringing them to my office or by turning them in during class in which case I return them the next class period.

Correcting the problem sets is a tremendous amount of work, but I have resisted writing answer keys to the problem sets because I want the experience of doing the problems to be more like doing problems on the exam in which you cannot consult an answer key to see how to do the problem if you get stuck.

- Mentoring: Each year I do research with one or two of the students who took organic chemistry the previous year. I see undergraduate research as another form of teaching, albeit one that is far more concentrated and time-consuming on a per student basis than teaching lecture and lab courses. An important aspect of directing undergraduate research is providing students the opportunity to determine if graduate school is an appropriate choice. To a lesser extent, a similar mentorship takes place in my laboratory courses, both with the students enrolled in the labs and with the teaching assistants, as it is in lab that I best get to know my students.

It is a great honor to have been selected a recipient of the Howard A. White Award for Teaching Excellence. When friends and family ask me why I enjoy my work, I reply that teaching is analogous to being a professional athlete or a performing artist; I get paid to do what I did as a kid for fun.

Theresa M. de los Santos
Assistant Professor of Communication
Seaver College

My central philosophy as a teacher is to actively engage and support students in their learning so that they may master material and use it purposefully in their daily lives and future careers. I accomplish this in the classroom by (1) using clear and engaging lectures and relevant, real-life examples that are constantly re-tailored to meet my students' interests and (2) setting a climate of collaboration, support, openness, pleasure, and humanity in which students are encouraged to actively participate and explore. Below, I describe my teaching approach and some tools I have developed to foster learning in my classes.

Mix of Engaging Lectures and Learning by Doing: I firmly believe that learning is most effective when it can be made personal and applied. My classes all include a mix of students first learning concepts, theories, and skills and then further engaging with them through hands-on application. To accomplish this, I use meticulously prepared lectures in the classroom that give students a foundation of information and knowledge. Then, in order to fully grasp the lecture material, my students do something with it. For instance, when I began teaching the undergraduate communication research methods course, I changed it to be a hands-on process in which students conduct their own empirical research. Prior to my teaching of the class, the main class project was a standard research proposal. In my class, as students learn the principles and language of social-science research, through a series of exercises I designed, they apply them to their own research projects. In order to not overwhelm students, I follow a careful step-by-step process. I lecture on a new part of the research process and then students add it to their project. This process of learning by doing is rewarding for the students. At the end of the semester, they have a presentable work of original research and a deep understanding of the difficulties, opportunities, and ethical choices research presents. This teaching strategy and rhythm of students learning and then doing is present in my other classes as well. In Introduction to Media, students apply learned media theories in an individual "Mini Media Issue" presentation. For a particular area of media, as they present on a single issue, problem, or achievement, they must explain potential effects of the issue through the lens of a media theory. After I teach about common strategies used by news organizations when covering politics, I have students watch and analyze post-debate coverage from three cable news networks. In Introduction to Journalism Writing and Editing, after I lecture on a specific story element or type of news story, students participate in related in-class writing exercises or go out and gather their own stories from city hall, the courthouse in downtown L.A., and all the other places their story ideas take them. In my graduate quantitative research methods class, at the beginning of the semester I have the students design a questionnaire and collect a class data set with items of interest to them. Then, after we learn each new statistical test, students use the class data set to "play" and practice running the test with different variables. Overall, I am constantly seeking active and constructive ways to involve my students in their learning.

Make it Real: When students find relevance in the work they are doing and believe they have a need to know, they are more likely to engage and study harder. As an instructor, I aim to connect my students to real-life examples of course material. In general, students have a more difficult time

seeing the value of learning research methods. Thus, after my first semester of teaching the undergraduate level class, I led my colleagues in the implementation of a "Research in Action" guest speaker series for all of the 80-100 students who take research methods each semester. There are two sessions designed for students to hear about how communication practitioners and academics rely on and use research methods in their careers. The series has included speakers from eHarmony, Fox Entertainment, Nielsen Media, The L.A. Unified School District, and a political consulting firm. On a smaller scale, in my research methods classes, when possible, I use real examples to teach concepts. For example, to demonstrate the importance of journalists and news consumers knowing the difference between correlation and causation, I have students work through an exercise with actual misleading news headlines. In my journalism and media classes, I incorporate examples from my experience working in the broadcast news industry and I utilize my deep network of former colleagues who still work in the Los Angeles news market and other areas of Hollywood by having them speak in my classes, show my students examples of what they learning in their work, and critique my students' work. Guest speaker days are not days off for me. I prepare slides for the topic and send my guests my lecture notes in advance. They become my co-lecturer to make the content come alive through real, working examples. Every semester, I also take my journalism classes on a field trip to the Fox Television Studios, where I used to work, to watch a live television news broadcast from the studio and control room. It is all about getting students to connect *what* they are learning to *how* and *why* it matters outside the classroom.

Exams: My teaching philosophy rests on the idea that I must set and maintain high standards of excellence for my students. The exams I give demonstrate this. I design exams not to encourage note memorization, but rather to challenge students to apply and use learned concepts to solve problems. In my Introduction to Media course, exams require students to make connections between concepts and theories by comparing and contrasting them, providing examples from their own lives, and explaining how learned concepts can be used to help others and in potential future careers. In my undergraduate methods course, exam questions require students to apply course material to hypothetical research examples. Before exams, I provide detailed study guides and hold two review sessions. The first session, held a week before an exam, is typically a broader review of concepts. Then I hold a second, optional session the night before exams for students to come and ask more specific questions about the material brought up by their studying. After each test, I go over them in class and address questions missed by a large number of students. Ultimately, I strive for my exams to provide important reviews of course content and practice applying concepts that hopefully results in a better overall understanding of the material and heightened retention so that gained knowledge can be applied in future settings.

Vocational Discovery: As college years are a significant time for learning and exploration, I try to provide an educational experience that helps my students identify and pursue their Christian vocation. One clear example of this can be found in the career interview and profile piece assignments that I use in my journalism and media classes. The Career Interview has students identify and interview one person, who they have never had contact with before, working in the area of media they hope to land a job in. In the interview, I encourage students to ask hard questions to gain a clear understanding of whether or not the career is a fit for them. They then write an analysis of their experience in which they address relationships between their personal hopes, values, gifts, and faith and the particular career they learned about. They also fill out a detailed action plan that outlines the steps they need to take to better understand and/or achieve purposeful work. The Profile

Piece is very similar to the Career Interview, but it has my Journalism 241 students write a day-in-the-life profile news piece about the person they interviewed along with the analysis of their experience. Through these sorts of activities, I hope students leave my classrooms with a better sense of their higher purpose.

Natasha Thapar-Olmos, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychology
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Receiving the Howard A. White in 2017 was a great honor, and being asked to submit a teaching statement as a HAW recipient has given me the opportunity to reflect, again, on my teaching practices and the values that I aspire to embody as a teacher. In doing this exercise, I realized that I had not significantly updated my teaching statement since I started at Pepperdine in 2013. Thus, I've included my edits in bold to track the development of my practices since I started.

The essential elements of my teaching philosophy are developing students' skills in the following areas: (1) Critical thinking, (2) Communication, and (3) Application.

Critical Thinking

I believe that critical thinking is the most crucial transferable skill for undergraduate and graduate students, who are training to embark on productive careers, hopefully in the field of their choosing (which may or may not be psychology). I use a variety of approaches in the **on-ground and online** classroom to develop this skill.

I develop assignments that are designed to challenge this area of development. I also frame the content of my lectures and the delivery to foster this skill. For example, in my lectures I encourage students to pose critical questions of course material, and I will frequently model this by engaging students in Socratic questioning during discussions or lectures when appropriate. My writing assignments always include an element of critical analysis, and I provide detailed feedback on students' assignments to encourage **the development of their skills in** iterative analysis. I design assignments over the duration of the course and build incrementally on skills I expect my students are developing. **I've consistently received feedback from students that the way assignments are broken down into smaller parts in my courses makes the writing process (in particular) less overwhelming. I have come to believe it also allows them to observe their own development and growth, which often leads to increased self-awareness (and at time, increased confidence).**

As a clinical psychologist trained in the scientist-practitioner model, I believe that research in psychology is an indispensable tool to teach critical thinking. The inclusion of research-based content also ensures that my courses are updated to the state of the field. I often challenge student to apply their critical thinking skills to how they consume information in their environments. For example, in teaching a research methods class, I frequently bring in media reports of research and challenge my students to apply their knowledge of research methods to become critical consumers of this information. I believe that these kinds of exercises engage students and model application of skills learned in the classroom to the real world. **In my doctoral level research methods courses, I now require students to select a piece of news in the popular media, and**

conduct their own analysis of the quality of reporting after reading the source journal article. This exercise forces them to apply information from my class presentations, and it's a good opportunity to talk about the role of professionals in contributing to the distribution of credible information.

Communication

I believe that communication skills are the bridge between critical thinking and application, and are therefore a second essential aspect of undergraduate, and especially graduate, education. In the classroom, I encourage verbal participation and outside of the classroom, I frequently assign written exercises, to develop communication skills in these basic modes.

I also model a certain communication style in my teaching, which I would describe as both approachable and interactive. I encourage questions and participation, regardless of class size, and I also offer more individualized guidance in office hours or in written feedback. When possible within the scope of a class, I encourage oral presentations either in small or large groups to help students develop skills in verbally articulating ideas.

I consider media and popular culture to be valuable forums for communication in our culture and so I frequently integrate movies, music, or other forms of media in my lectures. I find this also keeps a younger audience engaged. **This is an area I am devoting more thought and reading to, as I have begun teaching online. I believe that technology, like any tool, can be used for both productive and unproductive purposes. I think it is the online teacher's responsibility to help students develop skills in using technology responsibly and productively. We are also teaching citizens of multiple intersecting communities, and am coming to believe that we must stay relevant in all forms of public discourse (yes, including Twitter).**

I believe that evaluation is also an important communicative aspect of education, and I consider evaluation to be both a process and outcome measure in teaching. In my evaluation methods, I anchor my feedback both to content of the course and to the development of the three essential elements.

Just as I value the provision of feedback in order to guide learning, I guide my own learning and development as a teacher by directly soliciting my students' feedback. I consider my students' experience of my teaching to be a valuable source of data to guide my approach. I believe that this practice models reciprocal communication and the mutual exchange of ideas, which are important professional and personal skills.

Application

A unique privilege of teaching psychology is that the discipline, by its very nature, is widely applicable to students' professional and personal development, regardless of their plans to pursue a career in psychology. I encourage active reflection on these topics in

my courses. For example, in teaching abnormal psychology, I frequently draw on my clinical experience to provide examples of application. Whenever possible, I use assignments that ask students to *apply* their knowledge, such as the development of a research study or survey in a research methods class. In teaching cognitive behavioral therapy, I ask my students to complete any exercise they would ask a client to complete, so that they learn by application and become better teachers and therapists themselves. **At the graduate level, I increasingly use written assessments for grading, as opposed to examinations. In some courses, I administer quizzes to assess knowledge of fundamental concepts, but on the whole, I focus on application, analysis, and interpretation.**

I find teaching to be a truly rewarding and invigorating enterprise, and it sharpens my thinking as I teach thinking. Above all, I consider it a privilege to educate and cultivate critical thinkers who can effectively communicate their knowledge and skills in a variety of real world applications.

Mary Holden
Visiting Instructor of Physics
Seaver College

I am deeply honored to receive this prestigious award and truly grateful to have the support of the faculty and staff. I would not have been able to be successful without them. My class is rigorous and challenging for my students, and my colleagues are so inspiring and encouraging.

My philosophy is to challenge the students not only to learn but to carry what they learn with them for the rest of their lives. Different teaching styles are used to accomplish this. My introduction to physics begins with basic equations and concepts with a directive approach while consistently highlighting to the students these basics are their template to solve any problem. Once they have mastered the basics I move to different problems and ask them to discuss the approach they use to solve. Demonstrations are important, so they can see a principle and make a better connection. Finding ways to motivate them to be curious about their world not just what they need for my class I feel is the cornerstone of learning.

The ability to relate what they are learning to their lives allows them to embrace how they learn. I delegate the process to the students so they can learn to the best of their ability and to construct their own process. I love to get to know my students, their majors, where they are from, their hobbies and their plans after college. My examples routinely relate to their hobbies and always something related to their career paths. I also bring my experiences from industry to incorporate into the class in addition to my personal experiences related to physics.

I truly care about all the students and have a passion to make them successful. My door is always open to the students to help with physics or any issues they may have. I spend a lot of time learning how each student thinks so I can help them to the best of their ability. It is so personally rewarding when you see the “light bulb” go on in their heads. This is the main reason why I teach.

I feel blessed to be teaching at such a great Christian university. Teaching has been a gift given to me as I did not find teaching, it found me. Pepperdine has allowed me to grow as a Christian and as a teacher as both are lifelong processes. Next to my family, teaching at Pepperdine has been the most rewarding thing in my life.