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Teaching Philosophy Statement

Teaching is my passion. As an educator, it is my responsibility to help students develop intellectually, personally, and professionally. My greatest strength as an instructor is my ability to create and sustain a good rapport with my students. Building a strong rapport allows me to individualize my instruction to help each student develop and reach their academic, individual, and vocational goals. I prioritize two aspects of teaching: (1) I create an active learning environment that engages students, and (2) I offer development opportunities outside of the classroom.

I use a variety of pedagogical techniques to create a collaborative learning environment where students have an opportunity to be included in the learning process, are engaged with the course material, and have frequent opportunities to share their thoughts. I believe that this allows me to build a better rapport with students by increasing their personal investment in the course. Here are a few examples of how I create an active learning environment.

I use a team-based learning (TBL) model in several of my courses, such as Adolescent Psychology and Introductory Psychology. TBL is an approach in which students work with the same small team of peers during each class. Students also complete projects and take part of each exam with their team. TBL allows students to develop genuine relationships with their peers, actively participate in small group settings, and develop important communication, teamwork, and leadership skills.

I incorporate live statistical programming demonstrations using R into my research and statistics courses. These sessions allow students to follow along with me while I teach. I also provide frequent opportunities for students to apply the lessons to new scenarios and get feedback. I spend most of these class periods walking around the room helping students interpret error messages, gauging individual understanding, and helping students gain confidence in their ability. However, I also encourage students to work together to solve complex problems, which encourages self-efficacy and teamwork. All students leave my research courses with a basic knowledge of R programming that can be put on their resume and support future educational and vocational goals.

I create a classroom environment that is fun, conversational, and encourages active participation. I encourage this environment by bringing energy and a sense of humor to each class, calling on specific students to encourage everyone to speak, and reinforcing effort. By developing an open and conversational atmosphere, I create a classroom where students feel comfortable discussing difficult topics about inclusion, race, gender, class, and disability.

Teaching does not end when the students leave the classroom. I engage students outside of the classroom environment and demonstrate my own passion for learning. Here are a few examples of how I create development opportunities beyond the classroom.

Some students, especially those applying to graduate school, need to develop their research skills. I run the Cognitive Science lab to help undergraduate students gain concrete professional and research skills. I treat all students in the lab as though they were graduate students and help them achieve a high level of independence. All students that participate in the lab graduate with the skills needed to independently conduct research, including programming in R, designing an empirical research project, writing an IRB application, collecting behavioral data, and presenting at research conferences. We also spend time reading articles, discussing ethical issues, collaborating with researchers at other institutions, developing graduate school and job application materials, and completing mock interviews.

I am the faculty advisor for the Maryville College chapter of Best Buddies, a global program that promotes inclusion for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In my role, I support the students in many ways, such as by helping them interface with the college, developing monthly programming, giving advice, and attending monthly parties. I also help them recruit new students, encourage students to attend sponsored events, and introduce the student leaders to community members who can support their efforts.

I provide opportunities for students to engage with the wider community by inviting guest speakers, requiring students to complete classroom observations, taking students on field trips, and offering course credit for volunteering in the community. As an example, in my developmental disabilities course, I recruited the founder of a local non-profit to speak to the students. We then organized a class field trip to visit their location and meet staff with disabilities. Students in that course are also able to volunteer with community partners and reflect on their experience as a final project.

I have a passion for teaching and mentoring students. I genuinely want to see my students achieve whatever academic, individual, and vocational goals they set. This translates to me bringing an enthusiasm to each class and developing a rapport with my students. Each semester, my formal and informal anonymous student evaluations include comments about my commitment to each student and my investment in their learning. It is these comments that I am most proud of and what motivates me to continue to develop as a teacher and mentor.