

Teaching Philosophy: Brian Crosby, Ph.D.

Early in my teaching career, I came across a quote that said, "*We teach what we like to learn and the reason many people go into teaching is vicariously to re-experience the primary joy experienced the first time they learned something they loved*" (Stephen Brookings). I clearly remember the first psychology course I took as a college freshman and how my excitement about the subject cleared previous indecision about my plan of study - ultimately directing my future education and work. I continue to share that experience with students in my classes to convey my passion and to encourage them to find theirs.

There are several qualities that I attempt to foster within my classes, each of which are related to my beliefs about how students learn best. First, and perhaps most important, I believe that students learn best when material is *personally meaningful*, and one of my goals is to help students apply information to their own experiences and behavior. Topics in psychology are well-suited for this goal. In my introductory course, for example, I emphasize how research in the area of learning and memory can be used to better prepare for exams. To highlight the connection between sleep and mood, I ask students to track their own mood and sleep over a period of two weeks and attempt to identify patterns that may help to change behavior and improve their own functioning. In my advanced clinical courses, the approach is a bit different. Instead of direct applications, I attempt to help students understand what it might be like to function as a clinical psychologist. Throughout the course, the process of assessing, diagnosing, and treating clients is emphasized through case reports and the sharing of my personal clinical experience. Students then integrate this material at the end of the semester through the development of a case report and treatment plan centered around a specific disorder of interest. Personal application has aided my own learning throughout my life and has directly influenced my teaching philosophy and approach.

Second, I believe that learning should be *challenging* and *stimulating* for all students, regardless of ability or preferred style of learning. To this end, I use multiple methods of presenting material and assessing learning in my courses. In addition to lecturing, my class periods regularly include video clips, demonstrations, class discussions, and case reviews. I find that varying the presentation of material helps to keep students engaged and interested in the material and ultimately contributes to improved learning and retention. I also use multiple methods to assess learning, including exams/quizzes, papers, critical thinking exercises, case diagnosis, and group work. This approach stems from my understanding that not all students demonstrate their learning in similar ways. For example, I have worked with many students who experience anxiety around exams and don't perform well. Some of these same students, when given more time and less pressure, can provide a critical and thoughtful evaluation of a clinical case that is unmatched by others, even those earning the highest grades on exams. One activity I have developed that I feel best captures this part of my teaching philosophy is a group project in which students work together to develop an original case study report. The individual sections of the project emphasize different skills, including creativity, research and analysis, oral presentation, and planning. Group members are encouraged to take the lead a section that best suits their perceived skills and then work together to produce a cohesive final product. I have found that the learning stimulated through these methods is well worth the effort of developing and evaluating them. My teaching experience has given me insight into the unique learning styles of individual students. My goal is to create courses that are as unique as my students.

Finally, I think that learning is promoted within an environment that is *structured*, *consistent* and *fair*. I feel that some of my strengths as an instructor are organization and providing feedback in a timely and structured manner. I like to have a clear plan conveyed to students for each class session and provide access to the materials (e.g., lecture outline) needed for each class in advance. In grading subjective components of tests or assignments (e.g., writing assignments), I establish clear guidelines for how grading decisions are reached and have a system in place for students to request a review of a grade they feel is unfair. Course evaluations have suggested to me that students value these aspects of my instruction.

With training in clinical psychology, several career paths were available to me (i.e., clinical, teaching, research). However, after my first teaching experience as a graduate student, I realized that teaching is what I enjoyed most. I am enthusiastic about teaching psychology and attempt to convey that enthusiasm to my students through my preparation and presentation of material. It is rewarding to work with students at a time when they are searching for the direction and meaning I found through psychology.