**Kiersten R. Baughman**

**Teaching Philosophy**

It is my firm belief that students are only as knowledgeable and successful as the instructor who teaches them. Passion is my key word. Teaching students is my passion. I hope to convey that clearly to my pupils and assist them in uncovering their passions as well. I believe that work is a necessary part of life, but that there are certain employment opportunities that are right for each individual. There are also career paths that are counter to one’s very nature. Too often, I have seen people choosing careers simply due to the financial return, or in other words, based on salary. While I agree that money is important, I believe that the fit is more crucial. “You have to love what you do, or else you will not be doing it for long!” I find myself repeating. I strive to impart to my students the importance of discovering their strengths and abilities, and capitalizing on these qualities when selecting a life-long career.

During my tenure as a graduate student, I have learned that higher education is not for everyone. Motivation is extremely important. Students who are attending college for reasons other than an individual desire to learn often struggle in the challenging collegiate environment. It is the job of caring instructors, in my opinion, to assist all students in determining their areas of interest, hone those skills, and ultimately prepare them for the road ahead – wherever that may lead. To this aim, I have the following goals for the enterprise of teaching: to identify areas of expertise and interest within each student, to engender a life-long appreciation for psychology (and in particular, *social* psychology) at work in everyday life, and to instill a love of learning new concepts to guide students on their career paths (varied as they are).

Prior to my first experience in a teaching role in the classroom, I must admit I was very nervous and cared deeply about how my students would perceive me. The nature of the course, a small lab section, was optimal for developing personal interactions, both among students and between me and the students. That first teaching endeavor proved to be the impetus for my discovery of my passion. I learned the names of all of my students, and developed a rapport with each of them as someone who valued their success and strived to do my utmost to enhance their learning in any way possible. One of the most rewarding aspects of teaching those students was the fact that several of them keep in contact with me via email and have enlisted my support in writing letters of recommendation for graduate school, jobs, and study abroad programs.

Any encounter I have with a student one-on-one I view as an opportunity to learn from him or her just as much as to teach. It is really important to me to understand a student as more than just a member of my classroom. I take the time to know my students as people rather than merely learners. Thus, one of the first questions I ask is where the student is headed in life. Is graduate school the goal? Do they want to pursue an educational career or go directly into the workplace? This is a pivotal process to understand how clear it is in the students’ minds what they excel at and would like to pursue as a career. If students are still searching for their strengths or how to utilize them, I make it my mission to identify areas of the course I’m teaching where they seem to take interest and perform well. Often, I may not know the best course for students, but I do my best to refer them to others who can further assist them.

In my life, I encounter various people in offices, on planes, in grocery stores, even in religious settings. The response I receive upon revealing that I’m in graduate school in psychology never ceases to amaze me. The average person thinks that I’m beginning the analysis of his or her habits right on the spot and typically proceeds to laugh nervously. Students, I’ve found, often have the same perceptions. I strive to instill in my students an appreciation for the myriad uses of psychology. Not all psychologists do the same work. Moreover, I encourage my students to recognize psychological principals at work in a variety of activities in which they engage daily. I have noticed that students really appreciate my illustrations of class concepts such as the bystander effect to the last time they witnessed a car accident and assumed that someone else had already called 911. Students generally enjoy learning that the biases and rather undesirable tendencies that they recognize in themselves once we cover them in class are not unique to them. It is humbling to realize that you fall prey to such cognitive biases as the self-serving bias, but it is fascinating and reassuring to learn that it is part of being human. Students typically are especially surprised (and comforted) that even being aware of such biases does not prevent psychologists themselves from falling victim to them as well.

Finally, just because I am passionate about psychology does not mean that every student I teach will feel the same way. I view it as an integral aspect of effective teaching to instill in students a drive and determination to never stop learning. Though not all fields require graduate level training, most jobs do at least require on-the-job training. I believe it is important that students develop a fondness for learning and refining the skills they need to perform their future careers – whatever that may be. This part of my philosophy goes back to my emphasis on passion. Future learning or training of any sort will be quite boring and unsuccessful if there is not an inherent desire within the student. By teaching the value of continued learning, I hope my students can put this to practical use in deriving enjoyment from their future training. I believe *how* something works and *why* it works that way are two essential questions we seek to understand. Through ever-changing research and knowledge gleaned from innovative projects, I, as well as my students, will always value learning.

My approach to the classroom is somewhat unconventional. While I certainly value my role as teacher and the one who imparts knowledge, I place much value as well in students teaching each other and learning through doing. I firmly believe that students learn more effectively and retain more information when they can create their own examples, critique perspectives themselves, choose sides in a debate, and argue their opinions. Informed by McKeachie and Bloom alike, I infuse my lectures with discussions, small group assignments, writing, illustrations of concepts, and videos to reinforce concepts. I would much rather spend more time covering a particularly difficult concept to ensure students firmly grasp and retain it than gloss over the same concept, leaving students with a fuzzy picture of the term.

My students attest to my caring nature, regularly meeting with me before, after, and outside of class. They know they can rely on me to arrive early to class, to be well-prepared and organized, to present the concepts for the day in a meaningful fashion, to pause frequently to ensure their understanding of the subject, and to welcome questions and feedback requiring additional explanations. My most fervent hope is that my students view me as prizing their success just as much (if not more) than they do, and willing to do whatever it takes to ensure that they are well-prepared for wherever life may lead them.