

JENNIFER LABRECQUE

Teaching Philosophy

Objective

I strive to create a learning environment that fosters personal as well as intellectual growth. To facilitate students' personal growth, I cultivate a classroom culture in which students are encouraged to share their knowledge and unique perspectives and have many opportunities to become comfortable doing so. To engage students intellectually, I encourage enhanced understanding through participating in the research process and developing skills for lifelong learning.

Personal growth

Help students find their voice

College is a time when many students are gaining independence for the first time, and in this important moment of transition it is valuable to present them with opportunities to express their ideas. However, they need a safe space in which their contribution is respected and appreciated, and it can be difficult to balance the eagerness of some students with the reticence of others.

I encourage this interactive balance as well as a general classroom culture of sharing by creating a number of opportunities for group work as well as in-class presentations. In the Motivation and Emotion course that I recently taught at Chapman, I began each class session with small group discussion of the assigned readings for the day. Within their groups, students discussed the open-ended questions I pulled from posts their classmates made earlier in the week. Following the small group discussions, one or two members from each group would share their group's insights with the class as a whole. I found that by having students engage in these small group discussions consistently for the duration of the course, even those students who were hesitant to speak up early on were strong contributors by the end of the course.

Just as small group discussions help students to gain the confidence to share their ideas, group presentations teach them valuable interpersonal skills as well as the opportunity to cultivate public speaking skills. I was both surprised and impressed with the way that some of my Chapman students took on leadership roles within their presentation groups, and all students learned more about their unique strengths as they found ways that they could effectively contribute to their groups. These group projects – in this case an experimental design task – demand creativity and collaboration as well as enthusiastic presentation to fellow students who no doubt benefit from the learning experience.

Celebrating diversity in the classroom

Teaching in Los Angeles has given me the opportunity to interact with students from all over the world and has taught me a great deal about how to respectfully relate to my students and facilitate their relationships with each other. USC is one of the most diverse private research universities in the country, enrolling 18% underrepresented minority students into the 2019 class. As a graduate student at USC, I TA'd three sections of Science of Happiness which presented numerous opportunities to invite my students to discuss their lay understandings of the origins of happiness from a variety of cultural, socioeconomic, religious, gender, and national perspectives. The other students and I greatly benefitted from this wealth of diversity in the classroom. However, even in environments that are more homogenous, I find it is possible to encourage students to express a diversity of perspectives. For example, at Chapman I assigned students to argue for or against a proposition so they could learn about considering evidence for an argument

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even if they didn't agree with it. I believe this is a particularly valuable lesson in open-mindedness in our increasingly divided society.

Intellectual growth

Teaching through research

Teaching students about how research is conducted is as critical as teaching them about the findings of the research. Students learn more when they understand the process researchers undertake to get to an answer rather than simply the conclusion at the end of their work.

I utilize research in a number of ways in my courses. In my recent Chapman course, I assigned a group project to research and design an experiment and then write up a very brief APA-formatted Introduction, Method, and Anticipated Results / Discussion. The students were challenged to think critically by solving the same kinds of problems that researchers must overcome when designing and implementing a study: how to best operationalize their constructs, consider tradeoffs in study designs between experimental control and external validity, and grapple with practical or ethical considerations for selecting participants. They also had to consider conflicting findings in the literature in writing their own hypotheses. Additionally, introducing students to basic statistical analysis empowered them to answer questions quantitatively and to appreciate the differences in measures of centrality and the importance of concepts like variance.

I also strongly encourage student involvement in research participation outside of class. Whether participating in a variety of studies for class credit, or joining a lab for more in-depth training as a research assistant, extended exposure to psychological research enhances content comprehension and gives our students essential roles in the evolution of the state of our field. My role as a graduate student mentor to four undergraduate honors students at USC was particularly meaningful to me. More recently, I had the opportunity to train students in the MPH program who have no background in psychology to run experiments in the lab, and they have gained skill and insight so quickly and are able to see their topic in a whole new way. Finally, one of my students from my Chapman course has even joined my lab as a volunteer research assistant this semester, and we are thrilled to have her. I'm glad that I spoke about my research with enough enthusiasm in class that she finds it worthwhile to make the hour commute to work with us.

Finally, whenever possible, I try to invite "Skype guest stars" to speak with my students. Giving students the opportunity to interact with esteemed faculty in the topic we are studying during these Skype conversations is a great way to get them actively engaged with the material and introduce them to important research and researchers in the field.

Learning beyond the classroom

We have such limited time with our students. Ten years post-graduation, they will likely have forgotten most of the answers to Exam #1. So it is crucial to teach them *how* to learn rather than merely *what* to learn (the classic "Will this be on the exam?" question).

Along with demonstrating how to find and use relevant resources (i.e., Google Scholar, PSYCINFO), I encourage students to ask better questions (i.e., operationalize!) and seek out answers to their own questions whenever possible. Developing these skills will serve them well beyond the scope of the textbook or duration of the course.