

Tracy Riggins, Ph.D.
Teaching Philosophy
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I have taught five organized courses: Introduction to Developmental Psychology (undergraduate level PSYC355), Advanced Developmental Psychology (graduate level PSYC611), Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience (graduate level PSY757/NACS728D), Developmental Psychology Seminar (graduate level PSYC888A) and Cognitive Electrophysiology Seminar (graduate level PSYC888D) at UMD.

General teaching approach. Based on my personal educational experiences, I believe that finding a way to personally relate the material to individual students and their interests is essential for good teaching at both the graduate and undergraduate level. As such, in both the classroom and laboratory, I attempt to present both the basic material as well as how it relates to each student in order to tap into and capitalize on their intrinsic motivation to learn. In addition, I believe that quality teaching should not only convey the fundamental disciplinary concepts but also foster and promote critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are vital because they enable students to continue the process of learning on their own outside the academic setting. Focusing on the principles of intrinsic motivation and critical thinking is valuable in any teaching position; however, they are particularly suited to psychology, where the aim is not simply to prepare students for a single occupation, but to prepare them for a variety of future career goals.

Knowing the students and how they can and will use the information I provide is essential for the development of my course objectives and the expectations I set for both my undergraduate and graduate students. In practice, I have incorporated these principles through a variety of different mechanisms. For example, in the classroom setting I give assignments that allow course content to be actively related to students' personal experiences outside of the classroom. Methods such as this enable students to find links with other aspects of their education, successfully integrate new information into existing knowledge frameworks, and apply it to their career goals. I also encourage students to be critical consumers of information by having them actively think about, participate in, and work with course material. I have found that, regardless of class size, varying the presentation format by including videos, collaborative learning assignments (group discussions and presentations), out of class assignments (observation assignments, written reports, web-based research, and personal reflections), and using guest lecturers aids in keeping students' attention, motivation, and performance high throughout the duration of the course. In addition to encouraging evaluation of the material from multiple angles, this practice also reflects my appreciation of individual differences in learning styles. Although I set high expectations in the classroom, I also maintain flexibility to accommodate cultural, educational, and experiential diversity. Toward this end, I have adopted a strategy of both assessing the effectiveness of my teaching (via anonymous evaluations during the semester) and clearly defining expectations continuously throughout the duration of a course.

Although I have formulated and utilized this general approach in my teaching thus far, my philosophy remains a work in progress and will continue to be throughout my career as I continue to learn from my students. As mentioned above, I administer my own anonymous course evaluations each semester. I use these evaluations to make improvements to the course and explain changes I make to the class so students know their needs and concerns have been heard.

Specific course details. The two courses I have taught most often at UMD are Introduction to Developmental Psychology (undergraduate level PSYC 355, 5 semesters) and Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience (graduate level PSYC757/NACS728D, 3 semesters). The first is a large (110-150 students) introductory, service course that provides a gateway to other upper-level psychology classes. The learning objectives for the course are: 1) What questions are of interest to developmental scientists and why, 2) How these questions can be addressed using classic and modern research techniques, 3) How these findings impact the field of developmental psychology, and 4) How these findings impact society. These objectives are assessed via online assignments, in-class assignments, and exams that include multiple choice questions, fill-in-the blank questions, and essays. According to the Undergraduate Advising Office, the class is popular and enrolls to capacity. Although I think the material is inherently interesting, I also think the consistently positive reviews I have received for this course have added to the enthusiasm for it. I recently completed the TLTC Elevate Fellows Program in which I developed an online version of this course (unrelated to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic).

The second course is a graduate seminar that provides an overview of the current research questions, methodologies, and findings from the field of developmental cognitive neuroscience. The goal of the course is to enhance students' understanding of the relation between developing brain bases and cognitive systems. In this class, students read review and empirical articles and are given opportunities to present material both informally and formally. In this manner, students are encouraged to think critically about research designs, results, and implications. Students are also required to write an empirical paper or research grant on a topic related to the field. This assignment provides students with skills in formulating study aims and hypotheses, study design and methodology, and data analytic plans. An interesting facet of this course, given its interdisciplinary nature, is that I often have students from several different departments (Psychology, NACS, Human Development, Linguistics, Hearing and Speech Sciences, Kinesiology, etc). It is an enjoyable challenge to ensure terminology is properly defined and that students speak up when there is confusion due to differences in disciplinary knowledge or understanding of the topics.

Finally, I have also taught three specialized graduate level courses: Advanced Developmental Psychology (PSYC611), Developmental Psychology Seminar (PSYC888A), and Cognitive Electrophysiology Seminar (PSYC888D). The goal of these courses is to provide students with more in-depth knowledge in developmental psychology or cognitive electrophysiology. These courses are enjoyable to teach as they allow for high quality, comprehensive discussions with students. One of these courses (PSYC611) drew on expertise of the three other developmental faculty members, who each gave guest lectures on their topics of expertise. Unfortunately, due to the team-taught nature, student feedback and evaluations were not as positive as we had hoped and we have since altered the course format. I hope to offer all these in-depth courses more often in the future as I believe they are beneficial for Ph.D. students who are launching their careers using these approaches.

Future Directions

With constant advances in scientific knowledge and technology, changes in student populations, and my own professional development, I expect to continually refine my teaching techniques. My shorter term goals this semester are to 1) enhance my efforts at incorporating an anti-racism approach to my teaching style and course material and 2) explore how best to use active learning assignments in a course with ~240 students (my largest class to date).

My longer term goals are to expand my course offerings for both undergraduate and graduate students. At the undergraduate level I would be interested in teaching a laboratory course on developmental psychology or cognitive electrophysiology that would give students more hands-on opportunities to learn how to conduct empirical research. At the graduate level I would like to develop a course on memory development, as it is an area of specialization in my research that I have yet to have the opportunity to share with students. My ultimate goal is that my teaching efforts will assist students in not only achieving their educational goals but also their life goals as they pursue career paths and strive to make a positive impact on the world around them.