

Essays from E-xcellence in Teaching

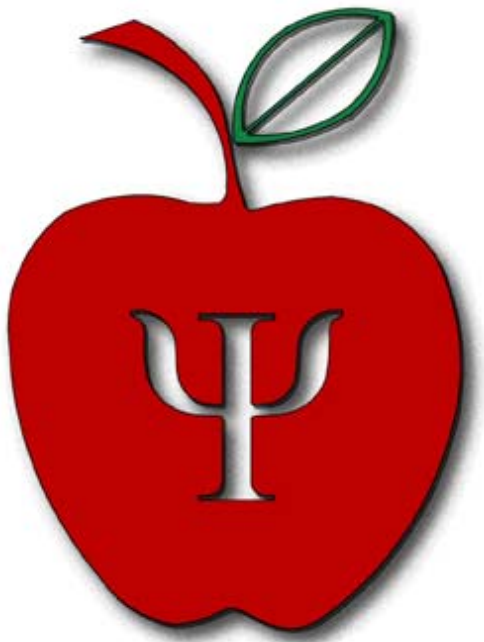
Volume IX

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Edited by

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Introduction

The Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP, Division 2 of the American Psychological Association) launched its Internet electronic discussion list, PsychTeacher™, in late 1998. In the spring of 2000, *E-xcellence in Teaching*, a monthly column devoted to the teaching of psychology, joined the list. The column features monthly essays devoted to teaching at the high school, community college, and university levels in general, and to the teaching of psychology in particular. The essays take the form of lessons learned, advice and hints on particular aspects of teaching, lore regarding teaching, book reviews, and reflections on our roles as teachers of psychology. In general, though, the primary focus of the column is to provide a forum for the discussion and promotion of effective teaching practices.

In Chapter 1, Elizabeth Davies examines social anxiety and narcissism as contributors to students' difficulties in learning psychology. She then suggests several classroom exercises to assist students in overcoming these obstacles, including peer-editing assignments, strategies for providing feedback, and structured role-plays. Because previous research has shown that negative academic emotions, including anxiety and shame, predict poor academic performance and attrition, these strategies have the potential to improve academic outcomes for students and to make teaching more satisfying.

In Chapter 2, Dana Dunn suggests that a compelling argument can be made that students learn research methods best by actually doing research. To develop research opportunities, teachers should first identify their learning goals and outcomes for research methods classes or any classes that rely heavily on methodology or research experiences. Instructors should then decide the nature of the research experience (e.g., replication, original) and subsequently introduce a variety of active learning activities as students execute and report on a research project in psychology.

MySpace, classroom response technology (clickers), and course management systems (Blackboard, WebCT) are useful tools for motivating deeper engagement with course materials, increasing student interest in learning in online and face-to-face courses, and mentoring student researchers. In Chapter 3, Kim Case and Beth Hentges suggest ideas for incorporating clickers into lectures and class discussion, and provide an example of a MySpace project assignment. They also provide suggestions for using WebCT as a tool for teaching students about the research process.

Psychology departments around the country are increasingly emphasizing cross-cultural and international research in classes. In Chapter 4, Drs. Bartolini, Gharib, and Phillips explain how their department has been involved in an international transformation of many of their core courses over the past several years. They describe this process and present three examples of course transformations, including student learning outcomes and assessments.

Motivation theory suggests that students who adopt a mastery orientation to their work will exhibit all the productive learning behaviors that we would love to see and are convinced would work. However, if students don't perceive the learning situation as a safe one, they are more likely to focus on performance. In Chapter 5, Marilla Svinicki offers several strategies for helping students feel safe enough to take risks and try new things, a hallmark of mastery goal orientation.

Recently, a great deal of attention has been focused on the new Generation Y or Millennial generation of learners born between 1981 and 1999. Although there is an abundance of available literature describing the traits of Millennials, little has been published regarding how these characteristics impact the teaching and learning process. In order to better meet the needs of Millennial students, Christy Price explores perceptions of Millennial learners regarding their ideal professors, their learning environments, and the implications for teaching Millennial learners in Chapter 6.

With trillions of Web pages on the Internet, it is a challenge to find useful resources to incorporate into your teaching and your students' learning. It is also a challenge to find meaningful uses for those resources. In Chapter 7, Jon Mueller facilitates this process by recommending some of the most helpful psychology resources available on the Web. He then illustrates how to locate such sites on your own and he describes some effective uses of the Web that faculty are currently employing.

Psychology instructors often find it difficult to present controversial issues to their students. In Chapter 8, Christa Marshall, Danielle Doucette, and Ufuoma Abiola suggest best practices for teaching contentious topics and provide examples for how to prepare and execute a controversial lecture. They discuss ways to develop the first lecture, enhance classroom structure, facilitate group discussion, and implement projects on controversial topics.

Psychology instructors have the opportunity to teach their students how to make a difference through advocacy and activism in ways that are consistent with course material. In Chapter 9, Steven Meyers describes how professors can connect their class content with relevant social problems, explains how students can outreach their elected officials, and highlights strategies for students to participate in social and political action about issues germane to psychology.

Over the past few decades, educators have debated the status of education in the United States, often concluding that the American educational system is in a state of decline. There are several possible reasons for this purported decline, among them the continued use of ineffective teaching methods. In Chapter 10, Bryan Saville suggests that teachers of psychology would do well to follow the lead of those in clinical psychology who have called for the use of evidence-based treatments. Although implementing evidence-based teaching methods can be time-consuming and sometimes complicated, the ultimate effect is likely to be an improvement in student learning.

Survey data demonstrate that many introductory psychology students enter their courses with a host of misconceptions about human and animal behavior. Yet instructors often neglect to address these misconceptions in their teaching, assuming erroneously that accurate knowledge about psychology will drive out inaccurate knowledge. In Chapter 11, Scott Lilienfeld, Steven Jay Lynn, John Ruscio, and Barry Beyerstein argue for a "comparative" approach to the teaching of psychology in which instructors continually compare accurate with inaccurate information and use misconceptions as didactic vehicles for imparting knowledge.

There is no doubt that intentional learning is superior to incidental learning. Instructors who prepare a set of "learning objectives" for their classes do themselves and their students a service. However, in Chapter 12, Josh Gerow posits that learning objectives that guide instruction and define course content seldom reflect the larger, overarching ideas and findings of the discipline of psychology that we really (should) want our students to contemplate,

remember, and carry with them long after our classes are over. He provides several general principles as examples to stimulate instructors to think about what they really want their students to take away from their introductory psychology classes.

This compilation of essays forms Volume IX of *E-xcellence in Teaching*. We thank the authors of these essays for their valuable contributions to the column and to the literature on the teaching of psychology and the scholarship on teaching and learning.

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