PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING STATEMENT

"Dr. Buzinski thoroughly knew the material, and we could tell he had a passion for the subject. He is VERY motivated in teaching; he cares that we learn the material and was very careful to cover every aspect of teaching (engagement, responsibility, priorities, timeliness, communication, etc.) in order to make sure he was an effective instructor. He also incorporated a versatile array of approaches (powerpoints, readings, surveys, activities, projects) that helped reinforce the material. I was very impressed by his drive."

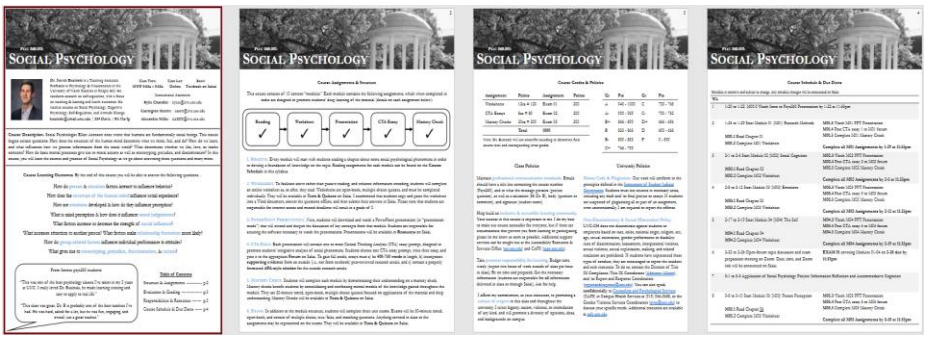
My teaching statement is a living document. It must be because it changes as my philosophy of teaching evolves, and my philosophy has evolved consistently over the course of my career. It does so because I do my best to ground my pedagogy in evidence, best practices, and the modern science of learning. For now, my teaching philosophy has three pillars: centering the learner, thoughtful structure, and revision.

Centering the Learner: Accessibility, Inclusiveness, & Pathways

"You're an awesome instructor. You seem very motivated and knowledgeable. Your approach and method for teaching always kept my attention. Because of you after this semester I actually feel like a Psych Major. Keep it up. You are making a wonderful impact -- HONESTLY!"

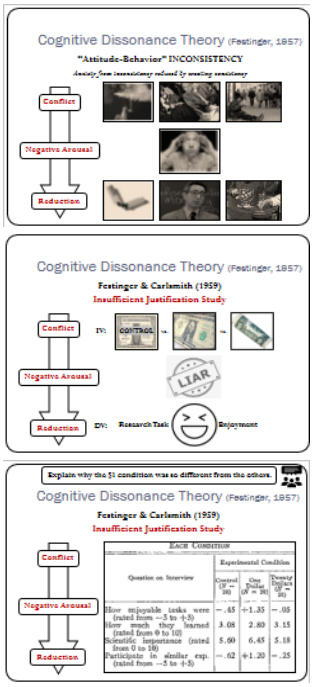
The predominant concern in a learner-centered course is the process of student learning. That may not appear distinct from any other course model at first, but centering the learner has distinct consequences. The most important of which is embracing that learning is a multi-causal phenomenon and thus requires an instructor to consider the breadth of the social determinants of learning. A 50-minute presentation, no matter how dynamic, interesting, or engaging, is not sufficient to establish a situation in which learning is likely. The scope of consideration must be wider: learner-centering instructors need to be thoughtful creators of learning environments, inside and outside of the classroom. I am there to mentor, guide, and nudge students toward building coherent narratives and strong mental models of our science, facilitated by building and maintaining inclusive spaces that value diversity and increase accessibility, that illuminate the often-hidden pathways to entering and progressing in our discipline, and helping students to develop a sense of competence, autonomy, and belonging in science.

I start this work by establishing clear, high expectations for students in the course syllabus and during the first day of class, as higher perceived instructor expectations have been shown to increase student motivation and learning (Jacobson, et al. 1992). The syllabus can play an outsized role in establishing expectations because it is the first information that most students receive about a course and its instructor. Syllabus bloat, due to administratively mandated language and instructors adding but not editing course policies, often results in lengthy, unwieldy documents that students avoid reading. To increase the likelihood that students will read my syllabus, I have revised it to four pages, reduced jargon and clutter, incorporated elements of visual design (e.g., dual coding), and assigned its reading.



I use the first class meeting each semester to further establish course expectations. Rather than going directly into course content, I lead students in a discussion of the research supporting the major elements of my course design. We cover research on the testing effect, metacognition, attendance, engagement, and the positive and negatives outcomes of technology

use in the classroom. My goal is that, by clarifying my evidence-based approach, students will experience greater buy in to the process of learning.



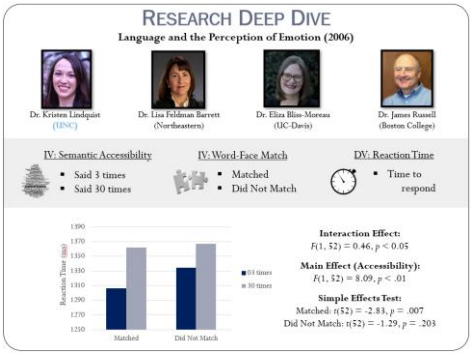
One of the most important departures from traditional teaching models in the learner-centered approach is the design of class meetings. Rather than spending the majority of class lecturing, I use 5-minute periods of "funneled explication" (i.e., explaining concept then relevant theory then individual supporting studies; see the conceptual funnel to the right) to build coherent narratives of the material, followed by periods of student activity and reflection. Importantly, the primary goal of those periods is to set a situation in which students are actively transforming, reducing, encoding, and storing information. I provide structure and support with active learning techniques like think-pair-share, retrieval practice, one-minute papers, see one, do one, teach one, group-regroup, debate, and games. These pedagogies scaffold engagement but also reinforce the expectation that students are ultimately the architects of their own learning.

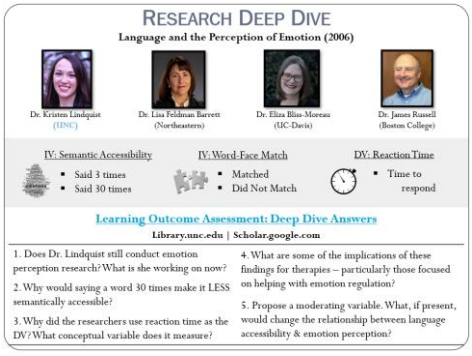
Whereas students must be active and responsible for their learning, an instructor in the learner-centered model is primarily responsible for setting an environment in which all students can succeed. This requires increasing student engagement and removing barriers to their learning; factors that determine the intensity and duration of information processing (Kruglanski & Thompson, 1999; Deci & Ryan, 2000). I do so by establishing an accessible, autonomous, and inclusive class. One of the primary ways to increase accessibility is to minimize costs. My course readings are either published research articles, accessible to students through UNC libraries, or open-access textbooks, meaning that my materials cost to students is $0.00. By using san serif fonts, minimizing visual clutter, and increasing color contrast in presentations, incorporating alt text for images, and using closed captioning I also enhance the visual and cognitive accessibility of course content. A sense of autonomy increases student intrinsic motivation, and thus engagement. I use a form of bounded autonomy by providing students with key choice points across the semester (e.g., content they would like more or less of, how to form project groups, choice of essays to write, class activities they prefer).

> "Also, it means a lot that Dr. B made a point to know all of our names. I felt like people (including those I worked with on our project) actually cared and knew me. It's hard to feel that in a big school, and it also makes the experience so much more pleasant. I'm more committed to working hard because I'm motivated to support my team and a professor who actually knows me."

I use additional techniques to establish an inclusive class environment. They start with a DEI statement in my course syllabi and a statement of positive regard during the first day of class, wherein I invite every student to a "coffee chat." This direct invitation to join me for a low-stakes conversation in a non-classroom, non-office space has significantly increased the number of students with whom I connect each semester; particularly students from underrepresented backgrounds who might be less likely to join traditional office hours. Moreover, using a BIPOC scholars database of research articles has allowed me to diversify the authors and content included in my course readings. I then have students research and discuss those authors, their affiliations, and related works further during class meetings as part of a "Research Deep Dive" assignment series. To help illuminate some of the hidden curriculum, I use that same assignment series to bring students' attention to the research being conducted by every member of the UNC Social Psychology program. I include faculty pictures, contact information, and the best practices for writing a professional email, in case a student is interested in pursuing a research assistant

position (see slides below for sample "Research Deep Dive" content). Similarly, I model for students how to include course-based research experiences on a resume, which helps them to be more competitive for future research opportunities.

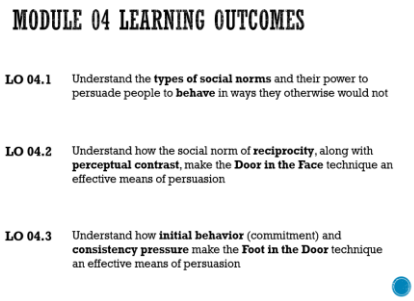


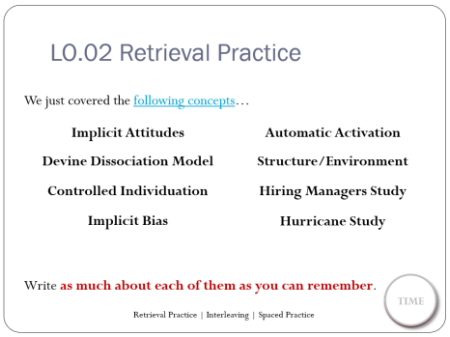


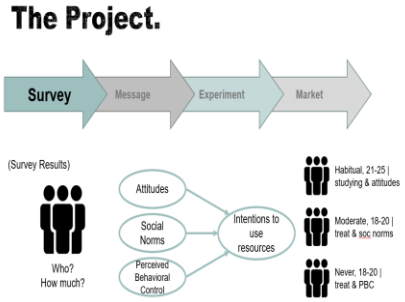
Thoughtful Design

The second pillar of my teaching philosophy is thoughtfully structured course design. The major elements of which are a) using a backwards-design model, b) leveraging the benefits of retrieval practice and feedback with consistent assessment, and c) using high-impact pedagogies.

Using backwards-design forces me to consolidate the conceptual learning outcomes for a course first, and only then start to consider downstream course structure. Importantly, to adhere to the backwards design model, I build my courses out in a stepwise fashion, from their most broad, abstract level (i.e., learning outcomes) to their most specific, concrete level (i.e., assessment items). Thus, one should be able to draw a throughline from a learning outcome down to through the concepts, theories, and studies taught to the discrete items that assess their understanding. Developing a course in this way also provides a significantly clearer narrative for students to follow as they are learning the material. To the beginner, a course can often seem like a collection of barely related information. By using backwards design, I can give students a road map to the overarching connections between those bits of information and from learning outcomes down to assessment items. To help students follow that road map, I reinforce the learning outcomes throughout the semester. They appear in the syllabus, on every reading worksheet (i.e., guides onto which students can take notes, organized by learning outcome), and in every presentation (class discussions are time-chunked by learning outcome). See a sample learning outcome slide below (left).







Consistent assessment and feedback are also a part of my thoughtful design. Assessment is not merely a means of measuring student learning; it is one of the most powerful creators and solidifiers of knowledge that we have at our disposal as instructors (Roediger, 2014). For that reason, I assess informally, such as when students complete "brain dumps" (see above, center) after a period of explication or discussion (Agarwal, 2018) and formally, such as when students complete learning outcome assessments. My assessments vary from low- to high-stakes, and occur before, during, and after class meetings. In addition to the benefit to student memory of retrieval practice, these practices allow a consistent flow of feedback from me to every student about how they are progressing throughout the semester.

Teaching should be impactful and learning long-lasting. High impact pedagogies are a group of instructional techniques that aim to connect relatively abstract course material with the lives and goals of students, as well as the communities around them. There are several benefits associated with using high impact pedagogy. Two of them are particularly important to my overall teaching philosophy. First, information encoding, retrieval, and use/application are enhanced due to the increased practice with, and manipulation of, course material (Reed, 1988). Second, high impact pedagogies help students to understand the importance of their coursework. Service learning, scholarship-in-practice, and civic engagement projects all develop students' professionally relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities, and potentially allows them to make a meaningful impact on the science and community. This is in contrast to the "academic exercise" model, wherein students only demonstrate mastery within the confines of well-worn exercises or writing theoretically relevant but untested proposal papers. Because of the benefits associated with high impact pedagogy, I include some form of it in every one of my courses (see previous page, right).

I wanted to express my compliments to Team North Star on their "Be a P.A.L." project. They have been detail oriented and enthusiastic to work with throughout. The team followed a detailed timeline and provided me with constant communication on their progress. They have done an excellent job with the video, which now has a home on our website. I have been impressed.
-Brienne Rowh (Director of Fitness Services)

Feedback & Revision

Finally, I believe that feedback and revision are essential elements for an instructor's effectiveness. Using student feedback, collected through classroom assessment techniques (CATs), to iterate a course within a semester provides students with a sense of shared responsibility for course outcomes, and enhances the connectedness between students and professor (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Whereas end-of-semester course evaluations do provide some helpful information for future classes; I use CATs at several points within a semester to receive timely feedback. That feedback then helps me to make on-going adjustments to better accommodate the learning, pace, and norms of each new collection of students (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

Visiting Steve's class, it was very clear that he had a good classroom relationship with his students - he was able to create lively discussion with students both asking and answering questions and he had a good feel for how well his students were understanding new ideas. He also used a number of different teaching methods within a single class period, helping him connect with the variety of students in the class and keep everybody engaged.
-Dr. Samuel Kollins

Peer review is another valuable feedback tool that I use in order to identify pedagogical weaknesses in my courses. Our colleagues have deep expertise on a range of pedagogical and disciplinary topics, and tapping their feedback helps me to refine my teaching techniques as well as to develop topical depth and breadth. Moreover, when I am struggling with a classroom dilemma, I often find that colleagues have already encountered similar situations and are able to help me to alleviate the concern. To this end, I make it a point to frequently engage with the community of instructors at my UNC and beyond (e.g., through attending teaching conferences), and their feedback has been invaluable in shaping the current form of my teaching philosophy.

I do not believe that my philosophy will ever be finalized, but this is how it currently stands: center the learner, consider structure, assess often and provide feedback, make an impact, and seek out feedback in order to improve. Thank you for reading.