Teaching Statement — Dana C. Leighton, Ph.D.

My overarching teaching goal is for my students to be changed—to forever see the world and their experiences differently, through the prism of psychology. My core goals are to help students to understand the concepts, theories, perspectives, and values that underlie psychological knowledge and inquiry, and to develop independent, evaluative, and integrated thinking. I accomplish these goals by guiding students through knowledge acquisition, nurturing their scholarly development, and mentoring their progress. Over the course of my academic career, from community colleges, to a selective liberal arts college, to research universities, my best teachers were enthusiastic, dedicated to helping their students, and challenged them to excel; these qualities as the same ones I use to inspire my own students.

I enjoy teaching introductory psychology, where I feel lucky to introduce my students to psychological science and to communicate the enthusiasm I have for psychology. I teach my students psychological facts, theories, and concepts, but also foster discussion and critical analysis. I stress that scientific knowledge is a process rather than an end: we work collaboratively to explain what is known, to critically examine knowledge, to ask what is not known, and to discover new principles of human behavior. Like science, I believe that teaching is collaborative: teachers and students learning, questioning, analyzing, and discovering together.

As much as I like teaching introductory psychology, I especially like teaching more advanced psychology classes. At the undergraduate level, I have taught Social Psychology, Social Cognition, Stereotyping and Prejudice, Abnormal Psychology, Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Testing & Measurement, Research Methods, capstone Senior Seminar, and Careers in Psychology courses. At the graduate level, I have taught Advanced Social Psychology and Psychological Testing. I enjoy seeing my students develop as scholars in these courses, as they can take on more intensive and demanding assignments. I have completed a spectrum of experimental psychology graduate courses, which gives me a basis for preparing courses in developmental, cognitive, or sensation and perception. I would be comfortable preparing courses such as statistics, history and systems, intergroup relations, prosocial psychology, or political psychology.

Regardless of what class I teach, I am committed to creating a challenging and rigorous learning experience for my students through knowledge acquisition, critical analysis, and action. A critical foundation of learning is to gain knowledge, whether from textbooks and other secondary source materials, or through primary source readings. Deeper understanding is built on this foundation through critical analysis, often in the form of discussions, taking the perspectives of others, and thoughtful reflection. I also believe that learning and understanding is enriched through action: working with others, applying knowledge to problems or issues in society, and by teaching others.

I use diverse teaching methods to best accomplish my course goals. For example, to help introductory students understand the science underlying psychological knowledge, I use experimental psychophysiology laboratory sessions to go beyond studying the science of psychology to actually doing psychological science. These exercises are consistently rated by

my students as some of the most valuable parts of their classroom experience. When I taught abnormal psychology, I used service learning, where students worked together to produce a national mental health screening event. This provided a valuable service to the community and engaged students in community service. Through service, the abstraction of mental illness was made real, as were the methods psychologists use to understand and solve human problems.

I also make extensive use of technology as a teaching tool. In addition to experience with Blackboard and Moodle for hybrid and online course management, I have used blogs and wikis in my classes. I also use lecture capture to enable my students to review lectures online, and I am particularly interested in the ways students can create and disseminate knowledge using these technologies.

I believe writing is a core skill important to effective learning across the curriculum. Writing is a critical component of the learning process because it helps us thoughtfully reflect on our knowledge, biases, and experiences, place them in context with prior learning, and to clarify and elaborate our thinking. I stress that writing is a process rather than an end product; thus, my writing assignments revolve around the development of ideas and of writing skills. For example, if my students submit papers throughout the semester, each is submitted in a folder together with their previously marked papers. This process helps illuminate the development of my students as writers and thinkers as they learn to write more clearly, concisely, and accurately. Longer, more complex writing projects are a process of rewriting, where each revision develops the articulation of complex, integrated ideas. This developmental approach to learning is reflected throughout my teaching, as I guide my students toward advancing their scholarly development.

The teaching methods I use in class have been developed through regular formal and informal assessments of my teaching. A valuable end-of-term assessment has been to ask students what one aspect of the class I should keep doing, one I should stop doing, and one I should improve. This helps me reflect on my class structure and content in the context of student experience, and make changes that improve my teaching. I also improve my teaching through engaging in the scholarship of teaching, and have presented my methods and data at regional and national conferences.

Finally, I also believe mentoring students is important to effective teaching, and I have several years of experience advising students. My relationships with students, like all my professional and personal relationships, are guided by my most fundamental values: honesty, integrity, responsibility, and compassion. As a mentor, I draw on my active listening skills and my experience as an academic advisor to help guide students along their academic path, but also sometimes to help them overcome personal difficulties. College can be a stressful developmental experience for students as they navigate difficult, and often conflicting, personal, academic, and social demands. I feel that helping students achieve their goals, both academically and personally, is one of the great honors of being a teacher.

Teaching Experience (as instructor of record)			
Course taught	**Total sections**	**Institution**	**Sections taught**
Introductory/General Psychology and Honors General Psychology	58	Tri-County Technical College (2004–06)	25
		Portland Community College (2006–08)	19
		University of Arkansas (2012)	1
		Marywood University (2013)	1
		Hendrix College (2013)	1
		University of Arkansas (2015) incl. Honors	2
		Southern Arkansas University (2015–17) incl. Honors	9
Abnormal Psychology	10	Portland Community College (2006–08)	4
		Tri-County Technical College (2004–06)	2
		University of Arkansas (2015)	1
		Southern Arkansas University (2015–17)	3
Social Psychology	8	Portland Community College (2008)	1
		University of Arkansas (2011)	1
		Marywood University (2013)	1
		Hendrix College (2013)	2
		Southern Arkansas University (2015–17)	3
Testing & Measurement	2	Southern Arkansas University (2015–17)	2
Careers in Psychology	2	Southern Arkansas University (2015–17)	2
Senior Seminar (capstone)	2	Marywood University (2012)	2
Stereotyping and Prejudice	2	Hendrix College (2014)	2
Research Methods	1	Southern Arkansas University (2015–17)	1
Social Cognition	1	Hendrtix College (2014)	1
Organizational Psychology	1	Tri-County Technical College (2005)	1
Human Sexuality	1	Portland Community College (2007)	1
Graduate Psych Testing	1	Marywood University (2013)	1
Graduate Social Psychology	1	Marywood University (2012)	1