Kurt Lewin, a pioneering German social psychologist who escaped the Holocaust before it claimed his mother's life, once famously wrote, “Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice” (1948, p. 203). Instead, shortly after serving as president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Lewin called for action research addressing urgent societal problems such as anti-Semitism, group conflict, and social injustice.

More than half a century later, Lewin’s call has been answered with thousands of research reports on the psychology of prejudice, genocide, poverty, child abuse, and a host of other topics. Curiously, though, psychologists have yet to develop an equally large, coherent body of teaching materials focused on social issues.

In light of this omission, several years ago I published an article briefly describing an example of what I called “action teaching”—the pedagogical counterpart of Lewinian action research (Plous, 2000). In the example I provided, students participated in a role-playing exercise that challenged them to reduce the prejudice of a bigoted speaker by applying effective persuasion techniques. The goal of the role-playing exercise was twofold (as it is with psychology action teaching in general): to help students understand human behavior and to address important societal issues.

EXAMPLES OF ACTION TEACHING
Action teaching can involve classroom activities, field experiences, student assignments, or Internet-based demonstrations. Regardless of the approach taken, the core of action teaching is to embrace the twin goals of benefiting society as well as the individual student. Here are just a
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Is Psychology 101 More “Scientific” Than Other Introductory Science Courses? **YES!**

Salvador Macias III, PhD, and David R. Macias, BA
University of South Carolina Sumter

The first order of business is to offer a few very important explanations and clarifications. We are not saying that the field of psychology is more scientific than biology, chemistry, and physics or that psychology courses have more science content. Still, it is our position that Psychology 101 is a more scientific introductory course than are traditional introductory courses in the “natural sciences.”

At its most basic level, science requires testable explanations, sound research methods, and empirical data (Popper, 1980). With this definition in mind, we contend that introductory psychology courses have a greater emphasis on basic scientific concepts, including the role of theory, falsifiability, and research methods and on the importance of sampling, variability, and the nature of evidence. In short, introductory psychology courses are better than traditional natural sciences courses at presenting non-discipline-specific scientific principles. We believe that in the presentation of these principles, psychology can play a critical role in education.

The primary evidence for our claim comes from a textbook review we recently conducted. We examined 10 textbooks in each of these disciplines to evaluate how they addressed basic science concepts. Our only criteria were that these were to be introductory-level college texts published since 2000. We were careful not to use various editions of the same text (for a complete reference list of these 40 texts, please contact Salvador Macias). Our sources for these texts were the college bookstore, the library, and the shelves of cooperative colleagues. Thus, although we do not claim that this is a comprehensive list and we did not conduct a random sampling, we believe we have a genuine sample of textbooks that represent those currently on the market and used in typical college classes.

We searched the tables of contents and glossaries for indications of non-content-specific presentations of basic science concepts—that is, we looked for discussions of theory and hypotheses, of independent, dependent, confounding and extraneous variables. We searched for falsifiability and parsimony and for experimental groups and control groups. We included such relevant topics as sampling, internal and external validity, and statistics. In short, we sought any discussion that would present to students the fundamental ideas that make up any science.

Our data are presented in Figure 1 (see p. 14). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the difference in number of pages dedicated to basic science concepts in the texts reviewed was significant, $F(3, 36) = 35.87, p < .001$, with psychology showing by far the largest number of pages dedicated to these concepts. Moreover, this greater coverage was not due to longer texts; the psychology books were on average the shortest, $F(3, 36) = 4.14, p < .01$. A one-way ANOVA for a proportion of book length dedicated to basic science concepts showed that psychology texts not only dedicate from 3 to 15 times as many pages to basic science concepts but also have a significantly higher proportion of pages thus dedicated, $F(3, 36) = 34.28, p < .001$ (see Figure 2, p. 14). It is worth noting that 8 of the 10 psychology texts also had an appendix (with an average length of eight pages) explaining basic statistical concepts, and these were not included in the above analyses.

Numerous studies have shown that taking psychology courses as compared to other college courses results in a higher level of critical thinking skills. Leshowitz (1989) reported that undergraduate course work in a psychology research methods class generated much improved critical reasoning, compared with critical reasoning measured in courses in natural sciences, mathematics, and philosophy. Lehman, Lempert, and Nisbett (1988) compared graduate students in chemistry, law, medicine, and psychology on...
few innovative examples of action teaching developed in recent years:

• At Emerson College, students in a consumer psychology class learned about research methods by designing and testing their own public education campaign to encourage campus diners to make healthier food choices. In this group activity, students focused on an issue relevant to their daily lives, and to the extent that the campaign succeeded, diners were left with a healthier diet after the class had ended.

• In an empathy-building exercise at the University of Florida, students in a course on the psychology of women spent a full day observing or role-playing a woman who differed from them in age, ability status, religion, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, pregnancy, or motherhood. Students then wrote a paper about what it was like to live as the person they chose, and they gave a class presentation about their experience.

• After a devastating tsunami struck countries near the Indian Ocean, students at Western Washington University learned about cross-cultural responses to traumatic events and helped establish an International Tsunami Museum in Thailand. In its first week of operation, the class’s museum drew more than 3,000 visitors, and over time it received so many donations that the museum was able to buy a year’s supply of safe drinking water for local school children.

• The Project Implicit Web site (https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/), maintained at Harvard University and modeled after an interactive museum exhibit, has assessed millions of people for hidden biases based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and other social dimensions. Once an individual is assessed for bias, the Web site presents personalized feedback along with information about how to reduce implicit biases and stereotypes.

THE BENEFITS OF ACTION TEACHING
Although some psychology instructors may feel that societal problems such as bigotry, food choices, and natural disasters are irrelevant to the courses they teach, societal problems can play an indispensable role in psychology training. In my view, action teaching offers a way to make course material more relevant to students, and it represents a unique learning opportunity that students often rate as the most valuable part of a course.

For instance, when I asked students to rate the value of the prejudice reduction exercise mentioned earlier, they gave it a modal rating of 9 on a 9-point scale, and all students recommended using the exercise with future classes. As one student wrote on the anonymous evaluation form, “I feel like I learned a huge amount in a short period of time about being on both ends of a prejudice[d] statement.”

Why is action teaching effective? First, many students already care about social issues, so enthusiasm and participation rates tend to be high. Second, action teaching typically involves active learning; thus, its lessons tend to be enduring. Third, socially engaged learning promotes bonding and cohesion among members of the class. And of course, students generally see their course work as more meaningful when it serves the greater good.

For all these reasons, action teaching constitutes a win–win method of instruction that has educational as well as societal value (Azar, 2008). Indeed, instructors who ignore social problems miss two great opportunities. Not only do they miss an opportunity to improve society—a goal that led many of us to teach in the first place—but they miss an opportunity for memorable, meaningful, high-impact teaching.

WHO CAN BE AN ACTION TEACHER?
It’s easy to see how action teaching can enhance courses that already cover social or political issues, but what about other courses? Can action teaching be used across the curriculum in psychology? I believe the answer is yes; virtually any instructor can be an action teacher, including instructors who teach introductory psychology, research methods, statistics, and a wide variety of topical areas. To take just one example—the environment—here’s how action teachers might address a topic that many students care deeply about:

**Introductory psychology.** Action teachers might give a lecture on the link between human behavior and climate change, challenge students to reduce their carbon footprint for a week, and ask them to write a paper analyzing the experience. Especially interesting or worthwhile ideas might then be shared with the class. (Note: Action teaching is especially easy to employ in introductory psychology courses because so many topics apply to daily life. For a compilation, see http://psychologymatters.apa.org/.)

**Research methods.** Action teachers might assign group projects in which class members design and implement a local environmental initiative, measure its effect (e.g., in terms of reduced energy consumption, water usage, or disposable waste), analyze the results, and present their conclusions to the class.
The Nature Of Psychological Science
CAN STUDENTS’ MISCONCEPTIONS BE OVERCOME?

Ly T. L. Tran-Nguyen, PhD
Mesa Community College

When I ask my students what makes psychology a science, they usually get silent. This general reaction is not surprising and may reflect their limited understanding of the nature of science. McComas, Clough, and Almazroa (1998) coined the phrase “nature of science,” or NOS, to describe the characteristics of this enterprise as a fertile hybrid arena which blends aspects of various social studies of science including the history, sociology, and philosophy of science combined with research from the cognitive sciences such as psychology into a rich description of what science is, how it works, how scientists operate as a social group and how society itself both directs and reacts to scientific endeavors. (p. 4)

My students’ limited understanding of the nature of psychological science (NOPS) could be due partly to the type of instruction they have received in their previous science courses. In general, science education has placed greater importance on memorizing facts than on understanding the equally important processes of the scientific enterprise underlying the acquisition of those facts (McComas et al., 1998).

The goal I have is to teach my students that psychology is an empirical science. As psychologists, we attempt to understand and explain behavior and mental processes through the use of various research approaches. The research questions selected for investigation can be influenced by the social, cultural, and historical environment and generally involve a collective effort by many psychologists. As a science, psychology produces explanations about natural world phenomena that are empirically based, logical, testable, verifiable, creative, theory laden, durable, tentative, collaborative, and cumulative.

Having a realistic view of the NOPS is beneficial to the students and to society as a whole. An understanding of the NOPS can (a) promote positive attitudes toward the study of psychology as a science, (b) enhance learning of psychology concepts, (c) promote critical evaluation of psychological findings that influence decision making in everyday life, and (d) promote growth and advancement of psychology as a science through informed social decision making (McComas et al., 1998). Clough (2000) warned that students’ misconceptions can impact their attitude, interest, and learning about this scientific discipline. Even worse, society may lose potentially productive scientists if students of psychology do not view this field of study as a creative and exciting scientific endeavor.

To better instruct students on the NOPS, teachers must understand what misconceptions students may already hold. I surveyed a small convenience sample ($N = 40$) of student volunteers at the beginning of the spring semester of 2007 in three classes: Introduction to Psychology, Research Methods, and Biological Psychology. The survey consisted of several true/false statements reflecting common myths on the NOS modified from McComas (1998). Five common misconceptions along with the percentage of students who believed in them are shown in Table 1 (see p. 6).

The most frequent misconception for my students is that there is a “universal scientific method,” which they believe begins with “defining the problem” and concludes with “sharing the results.” It is interesting that this myth was
reported to have been started unintentionally by Keeslar in 1945 (McComas, 1998). Keeslar had good intentions of condensing and ordering a lengthy list of important aspects that scientists from various disciplines had indicated on his survey as being valid scientific steps in the research process. Textbook writers took this “list” and perpetuated the myth by numbering the steps and thus creating the illusion that there is a linear progression to how scientists perform their research. Unfortunately, there is a trickle down effect, such that one myth perpetuates another. Students who believe in such a universal scientific method also hold strongly to the false idea that if we just follow this linear method, we will always and objectively get to our research answers. Subsequently, they may start to view psychological science as a dry and boring enterprise, which is far from the truth.

**CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

In an effort to dispel students’ misconceptions, I teach the NOPS in my psychology courses through explicit instruction and engaging classroom activities. The following descriptions highlight some of the activities that I have used in various psychology courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>True/false statement</th>
<th>% of students who believe statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To answer research questions, scientists follow the well-prescribed steps of the scientific method</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science allows for an accurate understanding of reality</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answers to scientific questions stem naturally and objectively from the data</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientists strive for objectivity and rarely allow their preconceived ideas to influence their observations</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collected from well-controlled experiments can be used to reveal absolute truths about relationships in nature</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Card Exchange.** I start the semester in my research methods class by first having students understand their preconceived ideas about science, which may not be accurate. I use the Card Exchange activity, which involves dealing the students a random set of note cards with various notions about science (Cobern & Loving, 1998). First, they are allowed to individually rank order the note cards. Then they interact with other students to trade for a better hand of cards containing statements that they can concur with more strongly. Last, groups of students with similar ideas about science try to create a paragraph describing the science enterprise. Students’ written descriptions often affirm their erroneous preconceived ideas about science. This information then allows me to develop my lectures and class activities to address specific misconceptions.

**Inquiry Wheel.** Through the course of the semester, I introduce students to real science examples that demonstrate that the scientific process is rarely linear but rather more circular in nature. They first read about the Inquiry Wheel model of how science is done. This model, developed by Reiff, Harwood, and Phillipson (see Robinson, 2004) describes the scientific enterprise as a wheel without a concrete starting or ending point. The double-arrowed spokes of the “wheel” reflect important steps in the scientific process that point to the center of the wheel, the foundation of inquiry. After reading Robinson’s article, students then view science in action with the NOVA (1986) special, *The Case of the Frozen Addict*, in which doctors and scientists explore through various research approaches why young drug addicts became “frozen” like advanced Parkinson’s patients. Next, students complete an exercise modified from Bordens and Abbott (2002) that requires them to reflect on the case study and to confront the difficulty of fitting the research process in a linear model. Students soon embrace the Inquiry Wheel model as the more realistic model of the scientific process.

**Questioning the universal scientific method.** Once the notion of a universal scientific method is placed into question, I instruct that careful, objective observations are important in science but will not guarantee absolute knowledge about reality. Students learn that even with objective data, scientists can make subjective inferences that reflect their preconceived ideas. Gould’s (1980) article on women’s brains describes how scientists like Paul Broca and Maria Montessori came up with drastically different conclusions about women’s brains and their inferior or superior intelligence to men’s brains, respectively. To further illustrate this point, I then have students practice their skills of recording observations in Neisser’s (1967) selective attention task. They are asked to observe basketball passes
by players in white and black tee shirts and to record only passes made by black-shirted players (http://viscog. beckman.uiuc.edu/flashmovie/24.php). Consistently, several students fail to detect a black-shirted woman carrying a black umbrella strolling across the court. Although Neisser’s test is used frequently in the discussion of memory and selective attention, I use this task to illustrate analogously how paying attention to one’s research hypothesis can narrow one’s focus to other equally important observations that may contradict the original hypothesis.

*Mystery Tube and Feely Box.* Finally, I demonstrate to my students that scientific inferences are logically based on observations but that they require creativity. Several activities work well to make this point, including the “Mystery Tube” (Lederman & Abd-El-Khalick, 1998) and “Feely Box” (http://www.useo.k12.ut.us/curr/science/sciber00/7th/matter/sciber/feelybox.htm). Each of these activities involves an object with a concealed content, analogous to the concealed nature of scientific truths.

For example, students must record observations of the mysterious strings protruding from a “magical” tube and their apparent illogical behavior as they are pulled. Once observations have been recorded, students are provided with paper towel rolls, string, and various rings and gadgets to build their own tube. Students who successfully construct tubes that follow the Mystery Tube model are allowed to draw the “inside” designs of their tubes on the white board. In amazement, students realize that there are many creative ways the strings can be connected to produce similar actions. Likewise, many inferences can logically explain scientific results, all of which can be equally valid. Nevertheless, at the end of the exercise, students plead to have the mystery tube opened to reveal the “truth” of how the strings interconnect. I disappoint them by explaining that analogous to science, absolute truths related to research questions are unknown, so the content of my tube must remain a mystery; it helps that the ends of the tubes are glued together.

**CONCLUSION**
By the end of the semester, I sometimes find myself confronting my own misconception that students can learn about science and how it is done just by observing me model the process, reading the portrayals of science in textbook and journal articles, and engaging in “scientific” activities. All of these elements across the course of one semester, although important, are not likely sufficient to make students realize and fully appreciate the nonlinear, creative, theory-laden, tentative, and exciting nature of psychological science. However, I hope that with repeated exposure in several classes across time, students’ understanding of the NOPS is closer to the truth, whatever that may be.

**REFERENCES**


NOVA. (1986). *The case of the frozen addict* [Video]. Indiana University Film Rental Library. (1-800-942-0481)

Statistics. Action teachers might use government climate change data or other environmental information in classroom lectures and student problem sets. Students learning about regression, for example, might be interested to discover that research on heat and aggression predicts an annual increase of more than 12,000 murders and assaults in the United States for each 1°F rise in average temperature (Anderson, 2001).

Courses on decision making. Action teachers might explain how problem framing influences the choices people make and might ask students to develop environmentally friendly ways of framing product choices. Researchers have found, for instance, that people make more fuel-efficient choices when gas mileage is framed in terms of gallons per 100 miles driven than in miles per gallon (Larrick & Soll, 2008).

Courses on marketing and consumer research. Action teachers might discuss social marketing (i.e., the application of marketing techniques to create prosocial changes in behavior) and have the class develop a Web-based social marketing campaign to reduce climate change. This campaign might include streaming video messages, blogging, social networking, or other paperless forms of mass communication.

If action teachers want to have a wide impact on society, perhaps the single best use of time is to share their work with other instructors.

Turning to topics other than environmentalism, courses covering persuasion might invite students to increase voter registration, racial integration on campus, or other social goods defined by the students themselves. Courses in neuroscience might offer action teaching assignments in neuroeconomics, neurolaw, or related fields at the intersection of science and society. Courses in personality psychology, developmental psychology, or conflict resolution might discuss the societal benefits of empathy and challenge students to devise interventions to increase it. In sum, the possibilities for action teaching are as broad as the number of issues facing society.

TIPS ON IMPLEMENTATION

Good teaching is grounded in respect for students, and action teaching is no exception. With that principle in mind, let me offer three tips for implementing effective action teaching.

First, action teaching should be pedagogical, not partisan. That is, instructors should never use their teaching position or the students in their classes simply to advance a political agenda. If an instructor has any doubt about where the line between pedagogy and partisanship is, my advice would be to consult a dean, departmental chairperson, or other senior colleagues.

Second, to avoid coercion, I recommend giving students the chance to opt out of any action teaching assignment or course activity that they prefer not to do (in fact, an “opt out” clause is something I use whether or not a lesson involves action teaching). To take an example, here is what my introductory social psychology syllabus says about a series of small assignments:

If at any point you prefer not to complete an assignment (or if your attempt to complete it is unsuccessful), you can still receive full credit by turning in a one-page report discussing the barriers that prevented you from carrying out the assignment.

In those rare cases when students opt out, they invariably appreciate the freedom to do so and seldom opt out of anything else in the course.

Third, I suggest assessing the effectiveness of action teaching techniques whenever possible, including the solicitation of anonymous feedback from students. This emphasis on assessment is consistent with Lewin’s approach to action research in which “action … is always followed by self-critical objective reconnaissance and evaluation of results” (Marrow, 1969, p. 193).

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISSEMINATION

Because a key goal of action teaching is to have a positive impact on society, it is just as important to disseminate good action teaching practices as it is to develop them for one’s own students. Efforts at dissemination include posting lesson plans and teaching materials on the Web; distributing them via listservs and social networks; publishing them in professional journals, magazines, and newsletters; and

Action Teaching, continued from page 4
Community College Students and Their Passionate Research

Wayne Klug, PhD

Berkshire Community College

It attracted long-haired antiwar activists and crew-cut military men. It was praised as “important work.” And as far as anyone can tell, it was one of the first times that research by students at a community college was invited to an APA convention.

Welcome to a poster presentation titled “Blaming the Innocent: Cognitive Dissonance in Iraq War Veterans,” based on the research of five young women from Berkshire Community College (BCC), where I teach. The researchers, all from military families, found psychological conflict among soldiers who had been involved in killing, but not among those who had not.

In previous studies of dissonance, individuals who behave aggressively tend to disparage their victims. In a surprising twist, my students found that soldiers who had killed in Iraq disparaged not their victims but American civilians, giving civilians lower ratings—and the war higher ratings—than did soldiers who had not killed. It was as if they were seeking to preempt anticipated criticism by denigrating the likely critics.

The findings have generated unexpected interest. Although the small, rural study was motivated by the personal concerns of its authors, they soon found themselves at the center of attention of more than 50 psychologists at APA’s 2008 Boston convention—and the focus of a subsequent article in Scientific American Mind magazine (see www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=soldiers-who-have-taken-a-life).

One admirer of the students’ presentation was Susan Opotow, president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, the APA division that sponsored the poster.

“This is such important work,” she told the BCC group. “You should be so proud.”

A LEGACY OF RESEARCH

Blaming the innocent was the latest of more than a dozen student projects conceived at our small Western Massachusetts college, where psychology enthusiasts have been turning out provocative studies for more than a decade. To some observers, it seems unlikely that our students—often bringing academic deficits and facing both work and family obligations—would have the time or background for such projects. What motivates these young researchers?

I think it is the opportunity to study problems they face in their own lives. Almost all who choose these projects pass through a sequence of courses I teach in social and media psychology that involve reading a variety of compelling studies in areas they find relevant—and paying some attention to research design in the process. For a required group project, I encourage them to think about personally meaningful questions that could form the basis for original research. A substantial minority choose this option, intrigued by the possibility of not merely consuming knowledge but also producing it.

Their topics reflect young adult concerns: school experiences, gender differences, military obligations. But since the studies involve gathering and analyzing data from human participants, they are rarely completed by the end of the term. The researchers often choose to take my second...
sharing them at meetings and workshops. In every case, these activities serve as “value multipliers” by putting action teaching materials into the hands of other instructors.

Indeed, action teachers who devote just one tenth of their teaching time to dissemination—and whose ideas are adopted by just 10 other instructors as a result—have roughly 100-fold more societal impact per time spent disseminating ideas than when employing them in their own teaching. That is, if action teachers want to have a wide impact on society, perhaps the single best use of time is to share their work with other instructors.

**HOW TO WIN $1,000**

As executive director of the Social Psychology Network (SPN), I am often contacted by instructors looking for action teaching materials, and in response I’ve posted a number of materials on two SPN Web sites:

www.SocialPsychology.org
www.UnderstandingPrejudice.org

Most action teaching pages posted on the first site have by now received 30,000–50,000 visits, and several action teaching pages on the second site have likewise received thousands of visits.

Emboldened by this high level of interest, I established an annual SPN Action Teaching Award in 2005. The award comes with a $1,000 cash prize, and entries that pass an initial screening are blind reviewed by a panel of teaching experts. Eligible entries include classroom activities, student assignments, field experiences, or Web-based tutorials and demonstrations (the four action teaching examples summarized on page 4 of this article either won the award or received honorable mention).

Best of all, anyone submitting an entry agrees to let SPN post an edited version on the Web for other instructors to use freely or adapt (with appropriate citation). In this way, the award not only honors and encourages innovative teaching but also builds a database of award-winning materials for use by the broader teaching community. Since the first winning entries were posted on the Web in 2006, these pages have collectively received over 30,000 visits.

**CONCLUSION**

I hope readers will address the urgent need for action teaching with the same creativity and passion that has marked Lewinian action research, and that they will share the fruits of their labor with others.

To facilitate the development and exchange of effective action teaching materials, I invite readers to submit entries for the next SPN Action Teaching Award. For details, including deadline information and a compendium of previous winners, please visit:

www.ActionTeaching.org

**REFERENCES**


Here are a few student assignments that capture the spirit of action teaching. Readers are welcome to use or adapt these assignments for their own teaching purposes.

**The Day of Compassion**

*Description:* This assignment challenges students to spend a full day living as compassionately as possible and then asks them to write a brief report analyzing the experience.

*Note:* Since the 1990s, I have given this assignment to more than 1,500 students. Most students find it to be very engaging, and some describe it as life changing. The assignment can be used to teach about empathy, prosocial behavior, bystander intervention, conflict resolution, and participant-observation research methods, among other topics.

*Social value:* As a result of this assignment, students have reconciled with estranged parents, mediated family disputes, helped friends and strangers in need, visited nursing home residents, contributed time or money to social causes, made micro-loans to people in developing nations, and carried out hundreds of other acts of kindness.

www.socialpsychology.org/teach/compassion.htm

**Internet-Based Persuasion Assignment**

*Description:* This assignment asks students to visit the anti-tobacco JoeChemo.org Web site, take a 10-item “Tobacco IQ Test,” get a personalized Smoke-o-Scope predicting their future health, and explore the site’s other features. Students are then asked to submit a report discussing the Web site’s strengths and weaknesses in persuading people not to smoke.

*Note:* The assignment can be used to teach about persuasion, social influence, behavior change, health psychology, advertising, and many other topics. For example, students studying persuasion might discuss how the Web site employs central and peripheral routes to persuasion, fear appeals, source credibility, the poison parasite defense, normative influence, and other attitude change techniques.

*Social value:* After completing this assignment, students often report a strengthening of anti-tobacco attitudes or, if they smoke, a desire to quit smoking. In addition, many students report sharing the site with friends or family members in an effort to protect the health of others.

www.socialpsychology.org/teach/chemo.htm

**The Diet & Lifestyle Choices Interview**

*Description:* This assignment invites students to take the Diet & Lifestyle Choices Interview, a Web-based interview capable of changing questions, response options, and item wordings depending on the previous answers given. After taking the interview, students write a paper comparing the experience with a traditional face-to-face interview.

*Note:* The interview used in this assignment is part of an ongoing research project on personal and moral decision making, so it offers a chance for students to see firsthand how advances in technology are opening up new ways to study complex social issues. The assignment can be used to teach about research methods, moral judgment and decision making, attitude measurement, interviewing, and other assorted topics.

*Social value:* When taking the interview, many students discover instances in which their lifestyle choices conflict with values that they hold (e.g., students with a meat-intensive diet may come to view their diet as conflicting with their desire to reduce climate change). In such cases, these discoveries help students think more deeply about their lifestyle choices, personal values, and beliefs about sustainable living.

www.socialpsychology.org/teach/lifestyle.htm

For dozens of other student assignments, classroom activities, and related resources on action teaching, please see:

- **SPN Action Teaching Award**
  [http://www.actionteaching.org](http://www.actionteaching.org)

- **UnderstandingPrejudice.org Teacher’s Corner**
  [http://www.understandingprejudice.org/teach/](http://www.understandingprejudice.org/teach/)

- **Institute for Humane Education**

- **Teaching Tolerance**
  [http://www.tolerance.org/](http://www.tolerance.org/)

—Scott Plous
course and finish the study there. If they are not in the position to do this, I encourage some of the next semester’s students to carry on for them. I think their eagerness to do so reflects the broad appeal of their peers’ concerns. So, too, does the willingness of some to continue with the project, if needed, long after the courses have ended.

“REPRODUCING INEQUALITY”—OR UNDERSTANDING IT?

In 1998, for example, a particularly bright student of mine described the awful time he had had in high school—full of disciplinary interventions, social isolation, and a yearning for challenging course work. After learning about school tracking in my class, he proposed a related study that might help him make sense of his high school experience. Several classmates immediately signed on.

The next year, with early results from 54 subjects, they brought a poster to a statewide conference that showcases work by students in the Massachusetts public higher education system. In 2000, having picked up several new authors and twice the number of subjects, they presented a paper at the annual meeting of the New England Psychological Association. And in 2001, now with data from over 200 subjects, two of the authors—one original and one “new”—presented a final poster, “Reproducing Inequality: Psychological Correlates of School Tracking,” at the convention of the American Psychological Society in Toronto, where attendees were struck by the precocity of these sophomores.

Sparked by their own experience of disenfranchisement in high school, a half-dozen community college students, now doing honors work, had shown that school track—and not socioeconomic status per se—predicts psychological disadvantage for lower tracked students. But for this group at least, the effects of that dynamic may have been neutralized by the discovery of research as a tool for understanding their own lives.

In the years since then, students have produced other fascinating work, whose results often refuted hypotheses, and which they, too, shared at conferences. For example: “The Pecking Order,” which identified social pressure consequences—for girls but not for boys—of different grade-clustering within the public schools; “Catechism and Sex,” which revealed no difference in moral reasoning between public and parochial high school students but suggested higher levels in girls than in boys, regardless of school; and “Don’t Trust Anyone Over 22,” which demonstrated that a bias against older adults exists among young adults—but not vice versa.

FEELING PASSIONATE ABOUT A CAUSE

What better setting for researching community dynamics than a community college? Recently, several national organizations have been making this point and thinking about sources of institutional support for faculty wanting to mentor such projects. Among these are the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR; www.cur.org), the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology (NITOP; www.nitop.org), and APA’s own Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges (PT@CC; www.apa.org/ed/pcue/ptatcchome.html), who recognize that student research confers enormous educational value.

Last year, I attended both the annual NITOP conference and a Boston gathering of colleagues from Massachusetts community colleges—one of several regional “conversations” sponsored by CUR around the country—where this theme was strongly endorsed. In my own experience, students who have done research and then transferred to 4-year schools come back to report they had found themselves at a significant advantage over other juniors.

Based on what students tell me, the research experience seems to be a watershed for many of them who pursue academic careers. My student Chris, who did a study in 1997 titled “They Think They’re So Great: In-Group/Out-Group Bias in a Student Senate,” subsequently transferred to Cornell, earned both a BS and an MS in biology, and is now working on a doctorate in Sweden. So many years later, I found myself acknowledged in his master’s thesis as the person who had introduced him to research.

Even those whose careers have taken different directions seem to cherish the empowering experience of an original research project. Last summer I invited several former students to join us for the Iraq presentation at the APA convention. Diane, who had been one of the presenters in Toronto in 2001, sent me an e-mail in which she regretfully declined, but not before reflecting on her experience at Berkshire Community College: “I must admit, I fondly think of the late nights of research and feeling passionate about a cause. Haven’t felt that in a while.”

PTN
KUDOS!

New TOPSS Committee Officers Elected

Congratulations to the newly elected TOPSS Committee officers:

CHAIR-ELECT
Katherine Minter, Westwood High School, Austin, TX

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE
Nancy Fenton, Antioch Community High School, Antioch, IL
Jann Longman, Liberty Senior High School, Renton, WA

TOPSS FACULTY REPRESENTATIVE
Barney Beins, PhD, Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY

Katherine, Nancy, Jann, and Barney began their new positions on January 1, 2009.

The TOPSS Committee thanks the following people for their service on the committee:

PAST CHAIR
Laura Brandt, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, IL

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE
Scott Reed, Hamilton High School, Chandler, AZ
Amy House, Astronaut High School, Titusville, FL

TOPSS FACULTY REPRESENTATIVE
Regan Gurung, PhD, University of Wisconsin Green Bay

TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSING IN A DEVELOPMENTALLY COHERENT CURRICULUM

The APA Board of Educational Affairs Task Force on Strengthening the Teaching and Learning of Undergraduate Psychological Science has completed its report, *Teaching, Learning, and Assessing in a Developmentally Coherent Curriculum*. The impetus for this work originated through early discussions of the APA Committee of Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges (PT@CC). Members of the task force included Patricia Puccio, EdD; Jerry Rudmann, PhD; Joe Mayo, EdD; Drew Appleby, PhD; Ted Bosack, PhD; and Retta Poe, PhD. Jane Halonen, PhD, served as a consultant to the task force.

This report (www.apa.org/ed/Teaching-Learning-Assessing-Report.pdf) identifies developmentally appropriate competencies that serve as benchmarks of student success as students progress from their first course through degree attainment, along with models for teaching, learning, and assessment. Hard copies of the report may be requested by writing to Martha Boenau (MBoenau@apa.org).

PT@CC Election Results

The APA Committee of Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges (PT@CC) is delighted to welcome two new members who joined the committee beginning in 2009:

Sue Frantz, MA, Highline Community College, Des Moines, WA
Lawrence Venuk, MS, Naugatuck Valley Community College, Waterbury, CT

The PT@CC Committee extends thanks and appreciation to Vincent Granito, PhD, of Lorain County Community College of Elyria, OH, and Vivian McCann, MA, of Portland Community College of Portland, OR, for their service to PT@CC and their commitment to excellence in the teaching of psychology.
various critical reasoning skills. Psychology graduate students showed a clear advantage over students from these other fields in terms of statistical and methodological reasoning, as well as in conditional and deductive logic. In a follow-up study, Lehman and Nisbett (1990) showed that this advantage for psychology also extended to undergraduate students.

Psychology 101 instructors are uniquely positioned to have a profound impact on high school and college students. It is estimated that over one million students will take a psychology course in any given year (Munsey, 2008), and psychology classes remain among the most popular in colleges and universities (“Psychology Is the Fourth Most Popular,” 2008). Knowledge of scientific content is, of course, a necessary component of basic education. Our data suggest that biology, chemistry, and physics devote more pages and effort to covering discipline-specific content. Yet the ability to develop critical thinking skills does not emerge simply from learning content; it must be taught independently (Halpern, 1996).

In addition, scientific knowledge grows at such a rate that much of what our students learn will be wrong or outdated within a few years of graduation. Not only does scientific knowledge double about every 5 years (Wurman, 1989), but “currency” in the scientific literature is about 8.5 years (i.e., the “half-life” of citations) (Lariviere, Archambault, & Gingras, 2007).

Given the statute of limitations on science facts, it is not the memory of specific details that is important; it is the scientific reasoning involved. At a time when state legislatures are considering laws that would require educators to accept students’ religious beliefs as equivalent to scientific facts when evaluating class performance¹ and boards of education are calling evolution an “incomplete science” because it is still theory,² it is clear that basic scientific understanding among even some of the educated is seriously lacking.

Educated consumers of science need to have the ability to evaluate information and the reliability of its sources; to consider such complex concepts as confounds and operational definitions; and to understand the importance of research methods, data analyses, and sampling. We believe that psychology is perhaps the best suited of all sciences to accomplish this task. As Randy Smith (2002) said, “Psychology is about critical thinking; life is about critical thinking” (p. ix).

REFERENCES

¹ In 2008 the Oklahoma House of Representatives approved such a bill (McNeely, 2008). This bill ultimately failed to pass the state senate, and subsequent attempts to have it appended to other bills have also failed.

² Also in 2008, a member of the South Carolina State Education Board argued against books that presented evolution because it is an “incomplete science” in that it is only theory (“S.C. Education Board Approves Book,” 2008). This effort also failed and a standard science text was adopted.


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EASTERN CONFERENCE ON THE TEACHING OF PSYCHOLOGY
The Art and Science of Teaching

June 19–20, 2009
Stonewall Jackson Hotel and Conference Center
Staunton, VA

The Department of Psychology at James Madison University will host the next Eastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology (ETOP) on Friday, June 19, and Saturday, June 20, 2009. The conference will offer concurrent symposia and workshops, a poster session, and two invited addresses on issues related to the teaching of psychology. Keynote speakers include David Myers of Hope College and Barney Beins of Ithaca College.

Our target audience includes teachers from high school, 2-year, 4-year college/university, and graduate school settings.

ETOP has made special efforts to make this year’s conference “budget-friendly”:

**REGISTRATION**

- Early-bird: $65 (before April 1)
- Teachers*: $50 (high school and community college)

For more information and to register, please visit: [http://www.psyc.jmu.edu/undergraduate/etop.html](http://www.psyc.jmu.edu/undergraduate/etop.html)
Imagine that you are happily married, relishing parenthood, and working at a job that you truly enjoy. You are in your mid-forties and are in pretty good overall health. Now imagine that you were just given the news that you have less than a half year to live. What would you do? Would you take a “Bucket List” sort of trip around the world to accomplish everything you always planned to do? Would you curl up in ball on your sofa, crying uncontrollably each day? Would you stay by the side of your life’s companion constantly, never wanting to let that person out of your sight? How would you cope with such dire news? When Dr. Randy Pausch learned that his pancreatic cancer was terminal, he started down a path that would help him become the author of the 2008 bestseller, The Last Lecture. The book focuses on his thoughts about how to live life and on the advice he wants to provide for his young children.

Randy was a respected computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon University. It is tradition there that professors give a final lecture before retiring. The school encourages speakers to focus on the question of the wisdom they would try to impart to the world if they knew it was their last chance. Randy’s situation did not merely involve retirement. He was giving a last lecture before his imminent death.

The book is filled with stories from Randy’s life and advice on how to truly live. It is filled with warmth, humor, and poignancy. While discussing his death, Randy never gets maudlin or morose—in fact, he is quite the opposite. To paraphrase Pausch, he is a Tigger, not an Eeyore. He faces his death in pretty much the same way he faced life: directly, and with optimism and humor. He never minimizes what is happening to him, but rather than focusing on dying, he concentrates on how to live the rest of his days.

The Last Lecture is a fairly quick read that will have readers laughing and wanting to share stories with others who are in the room. There are touching moments, for sure, but the author’s main goals are to share lessons from his life and to describe positive ways of living.

He talks of the benefit of asking for what you want. He shares the joys of being allowed to write and draw on his bedroom walls as a child. He gives advice on fulfilling his dreams. He talks of living life with joy and Jai (his wife). He talks about bringing happiness to others and how to be successful. One of the book’s recurring themes is the walls we face in life. Randy believes that “brick walls … give us a chance to show how badly we want something.”

I’ll share a couple of Randy’s stories that had an impact on me. One semester, he gave his students what he felt was a pretty challenging assignment. He was blown away by the excellent quality of the students’ work so early in the semester. He asked a colleague what he should do. The colleague said, “Go back into class tomorrow, look them in the eyes and say, ‘Guys, that was pretty good, but I know you can do better.’” The advice worked well, and students continued to impress him through the term. From this, we can see that we need to set challenging goals for our students in order to encourage them to keep doing their best.

The Last Lecture
Author: Randy Pausch with Jeffrey Zaslow
Publisher: Hyperion
Copyright: 2008
ISBN: 978-1-4013-2325-7
Length: 206 pages
Price: $21.95
Reviewed by: David Baskind, PhD, Delta College

“brick walls…give us a chance to show how badly we want something.”
Once, after buying a new Volkswagen convertible, Randy visited his sister. He watched as his sister told her two young children not to get the car dirty. He knew that this would be a near-impossible task for these children. So, he opened a can of pop and poured it on the back seat of his new car. He wanted the kids to know that people are more important than things. People often get overly concerned about possessions and about making messes, and Randy’s message of “It’s just stuff” is a valuable one.

I have discussed this book with many people and have found that they respond to the stories that make the biggest impression on them. Randy’s goal was mainly to give his children advice about life. In the process, he provided life lessons for millions.

The Last Lecture encompasses a variety of psychological topics, including optimism, parenting, happiness, marriage, and Kübler-Ross’s stages of death and dying. Given the growing interest in the field, this book would be a natural fit for those teaching positive psychology.

Admittedly, a book by an associate professor of computer science may not seem appropriate in most psychology classes. However, as the legions of readers of this book and the countless others who have seen Pausch on Oprah, Primetime Live, and the Internet can attest, this is not a typical book. Dr. Pausch has left behind a rich legacy that has touched millions of lives. PTN

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**ANNOUNCING THE 2009 APA PT@CC Electronic Project Contest**

The APA Committee of Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges (PT@CC) invites your students to participate in the seventh annual APA PT@CC Electronic Project Contest! Supported through funding by the APA Education Directorate and Allyn & Bacon Publishing Company, the Electronic Project recognizes innovative and high quality electronic presentations.

The Electronic Project Contest aims to promote active learning by means of electronic presentations developed by psychology students in either of the following categories:

- Presentations designed as demonstrations or teaching modules that illustrate and explain a psychological concept, theory, or research discovery.
- Presentations that illustrate and explain a service-learning experience or other application of psychology in the community.

Entries should be developed primarily by students and designed to explain the concept, research, or application to a 2-year college student audience. It may be helpful to think of these presentations as computerized teaching/learning modules or electronic “poster” presentations. Nearly any class project that can be put into a PowerPoint or similar electronic format will be acceptable.

The competition is open to students currently enrolled at a community college or other 2-year school. Students are eligible for the contest if they are community college students who have not previously completed a bachelor’s degree. Faculty sponsors must be members of APA’s PT@CC. If you have students who might be interested in entering, tell them about this opportunity and urge them to begin work on their presentations right away. The entry deadline is April 20, 2009.

The first place winner will be awarded $500; second and third place winners will receive $300 and $200, respectively. Certificates for all winners will be presented at the APA annual convention.

Look for the contest entry form and guidelines about the 2009 Electronic Project Contest on the Web at www.apa.org/ed/pcue/ptatcchome.html. For more information about this competition or PT@CC, please contact Jewel Beamon (JBeamon@apa.org).
Project Syllabus

WHAT WORKS WELL

Sue Frantz, MA
Highline Community College

Looking for new ideas for an old course? Delivering a new course for the first time and not sure where to begin? Curious about how others structure a course you also teach? Project Syllabus Web pages received 113,000 hits last year. Come see what everyone has discovered!

PROJECT SYLLABUS

Project Syllabus is a free service provided by the Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology (OTRP), a product of APA Division 2: Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP). Our database holds 163 syllabi in 35 categories, from A (Abnormal) to W (Women and Gender). What makes Project Syllabus so valuable is the peer review process. Our reviewers evaluate all submissions before selecting syllabi for posting.

If you have not visited Project Syllabus or if you have not visited recently, point your browser here: http://teachpsych.org/otrp/syllabi/syllabi.php

In March 2007, STP’s Web site underwent a major renovation. The new site provides an easy-to-use interface for finding OTRP resources, including syllabi in the Project Syllabus database.

When you visit the Project Syllabus opening page, you will see the categories of courses down the left side. Clicking on any one of those will bring up a page that lists the syllabi in that category. You will get the title of the course, the term the course was offered, the author’s name and affiliation, and a way to access the syllabus. Most syllabi are available in PDF and RTF; the latter is most easily managed by word-processing programs like MS Word. You will also see that some syllabi have an “Internet” button. Because some syllabi are only available by Web link or because some authors provide a number of additional resources on their Web sites, the Internet button provides an easy way to access those syllabi or additional content.

Are you looking for a new design for your course calendar? Do you need a new attendance and class participation policy? Do you want to set expectations for classroom behavior? Are you considering explaining to students how class time will be spent? Are you ready to revise your course objectives? When you visit Project Syllabus, notice the category called “Best Practices.” Several of our reviewers examined our entire database for five common syllabus components and identified the best examples of presenting calendars, explaining attendance and participation policies, setting expectations, explaining class time, and communicating course objectives.

When looking at the syllabi listings, you should notice that some syllabi have special designations. All syllabi that are for online or hybrid courses can be found by clicking on the “Online/Hybrid” category, but these syllabi are also cross-listed by course. Graduate courses do not have their own category, but within each category, you can find the graduate courses by looking for the “Graduate” designation. When submitting their syllabi, some faculty members also chose to have them evaluated by STP’s Diversity Committee. The Diversity Committee looks for assignments or class activities that support an understanding of multiple cultures. Syllabi that meet the Diversity Committee’s criteria receive the special designation of “Diversity.” You can find all Diversity syllabi under that special category label.

Submissions to Project Syllabus are always welcome! E-mail your syllabus as a Word or RTF document to syllabus@teachpsych.org. Within a few days, it will be sent to our reviewers, who typically take 2–3 weeks to complete their assessment. As with journal submissions, you will receive feedback and have an opportunity to revise your syllabus to address reviewers’ suggestions.
TIPS FOR WRITING A SYLLABUS THAT WORKS WELL

I invite you to pick up one of your syllabi and read it as a student would. Is this a course you would want to take?

More and more students are looking at syllabi to help them decide if they would like to enroll in that particular course. Your syllabus may be the only impression students get of you. Once students enroll, this document is the piece of you that students carry with them. For online courses, your syllabus may not only be the first impression students get—it may be the primary impression students get.

Be Organized

Does the syllabus answer most questions students have and is the information easy to locate?

Course description. Students should be able to find a description of the course easily. This description, even if it is just from your college catalog, gives students an idea of what they can expect to learn in the course.

Course objectives. Measurable course objectives tell students specifically what they can be expected to demonstrate by the end of the course. Depending on the level of detail in your course objectives, the objectives can either provide a nice overview of what the students will be learning or a detailed road map. The APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major (www.apa.org/ed/psymajor_guideline.pdf) can be tremendously helpful as you and your department consider learning objectives for your courses.

Policies and procedures. Do you have a clearly stated attendance policy? Late assignment policy? Makeup exam policy? Academic dishonesty policy? Can they be found with little effort? It is unlikely that students will memorize your policies, so they should be readily at hand for reference.

I would like to offer a few cautionary words about course policies. If your course policies are very lenient—say, a late assignment policy that allows students to turn in late work the last day of class—you may find yourself deeply regretting it at around 2 a.m., when course grades due at 9 a.m. the next day. You may also be tempted to write a harsh policy—for example, that assignments will not be accepted late. Before putting that in print, consider if you really mean it. If a student comes to you in tears over the death of a family member, would you be inclined to give him or her an extra few days to turn in that research paper that is worth half the grade? And now consider the student who had an equally tragic family event who would have benefited from those extra few days but who did not ask for an extension because he or she took what you wrote in the syllabus as an unbending rule. Whatever your policy, what you write should match what you do.

Calendar. Do you have a course calendar? Is it easy to use? Do you state when readings are due? When exams are due? When assignments are due? If it is possible that the course calendar will change, note at the top or the bottom of the calendar how students will receive information about changes. Will you announce it in class? Will you update the calendar on the course Web site or course management system? Will you e-mail the class?

Provide Rationale

Take an authoritative approach when writing your syllabus. Explain the reasons for your policies and your assignments. Students are more likely to abide by your policies if they know why you have them. Students will get more out of your assignments if they understand why they are doing them. Even better, clearly tie your assignments to your learning objectives. If you provide your rationale, students will appreciate seeing that you put significant thought into designing the course.

Use a Warm and Respectful Tone

Sometimes we get so caught up in adding rules to our syllabi that we forget we are instructors writing for students. Some syllabi read like a manual for new prisoners.

Write in the first person and allow your voice to show through. Use humor when appropriate. Include small graphics to break up the text. Use white space to make your syllabus less daunting. A syllabus that is essentially a list of things a student should not do comes across as cold and accusatory. “I haven’t even met the instructor yet, and she’s already assuming that I’m going to try to cheat!” A syllabus can clearly state the rules and maintain a positive tone.

Include strategies for success. Students appreciate knowing that you are not out to get them and that you really would like to see them succeed.

Use language that presents the course as a partnership. You can begin by “inviting” students into your course. If you are so inclined, attach a letter to the front of your syllabus.
welcoming them to the course and elaborating on why you are excited about being in this (real or virtual) classroom with them. Explain that while you will have plenty to share with them, you expect that they will also have plenty to share with you and their classmates.

Although faculty, students, and administrators often treat syllabi as legal documents, they are, by their very nature, your opportunity to frame your course in a way that gets you and your students off on the right foot. Put yourself in your syllabi. PTN

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2009 APA TOPSS EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARDS
Call for Nominations

The purpose of the APA TOPSS Excellence in Teaching Award is to provide an opportunity for TOPSS to recognize outstanding teachers in psychology. There will be up to three annual awards. Teachers of high school psychology who are self-nominated or nominated by a colleague, supervisor, student, or administrator are eligible.

Application Procedure
Nominated teachers are asked to provide the following:

1. A letter of reference from a former student, colleague, or supervisor
   a. Student letter will focus on the teacher’s commitment to academic excellence.
   b. Colleague or supervisor letter will focus on a teacher’s commitment to professional excellence.

2. A content outline for a lesson plan designed for a topic in psychology
   a. The outline must contain appropriate content and be accurate.
   b. The outline must be correlated to the National Standards (http://www.apa.org/ed/natlstandards.html).

3. Example(s) of activities, demonstrations, or programs related to the outline or topic
   a. Example(s) must be appropriate for the student population.
   b. Example(s) must be effective and involve active learning experiences for students.
   c. Example(s) must be aligned with the content in the outline for a lesson plan.

4. A statement of roles and initiatives that demonstrate and/or promote professional development activities and provide leadership for others in the field

5. A CV or résumé

Judging Criteria
Submissions will be evaluated using the rubric posted on the TOPSS Web site (www.apa.org/ed/topss/). The award committee is appointed by the TOPSS chair and will include no fewer than three members. Incomplete submissions will not be considered. The committee reserves the right not to confer an award if submissions do not meet minimum requirements.

Timeline
All supporting materials must be postmarked by March 14, 2009. Electronic submissions on CD are welcomed. Please submit materials to Jewel Beamon, APA Education Directorate, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002.

The winners will be announced in the Psychology Teacher Network newsletter.

A nomination form is available on the TOPSS Web site. For additional information, please contact Jewel Beamon at (202) 336-6076 or jbeamon@apa.org.
Meet the 2008 TOPSS EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD WINNERS

Marie Smith, PhD, Interviewer
Thomas S. Wootton High School

MARY JARVIS
Wausau West High School
Wausau, WI

Smith: Tell us about yourself. How long have you been teaching? Where did you come from, or have you been at this school for your whole career? What type of psychology courses do you have—general or AP? Do you have any special psychology programs like fairs or other activities?

Jarvis: I have taught psychology in the Wausau district for 32 years. I am presently teaching introductory psychology and advanced psychology full time at Wausau West High School. We began our advanced psychology program in 1995. It has grown to approximately 65 students each year. Our advanced psychology class is a one-semester class scheduled for second semester only. A one-semester introductory psychology class is a requirement first, and students may take the intro class as a junior or a senior. Our district is facing a climate of declining enrollments and a reduction of state funding. This decrease is now impacting the high school level, and the reduced student enrollments may impact the overall social science classes.

I’ve attended various AP Psychology workshops sponsored by TOPSS and the College Board. As a result of being a team leader at the 1998 Wesleyan Summer Institute, I developed a teaching unit on Stress and Health Promotion for TOPSS that originated from that institute. The unit is presently available from TOPSS in CD form or on the Web site at www.apa.org/ed/topss/homepage.html.

Smith: What do you like the most about teaching psychology compared to some other subjects you have taught? Give some examples of specific reasons you like or love teaching psychology.

Jarvis: What I love most about teaching psychology and what students enjoy about the class. Let me count the ways…

Psychology focuses on scientific methods and critical thinking skills. Most concepts throughout the introductory or AP course have immediate examples that students can relate and apply to their personal lives.

The various units presented are interesting and explore many relevant issues of our current world. The research is also ever changing, which offers a contemporary advantage of keeping the topics fresh and pertinent to life in general.

Smith: Talk about one of your most exciting or rewarding experiences with students or a student, from the viewpoint of the student experience. It could be an individual experience or a lesson or educational plan that you used that met or went beyond your expectations. What do the students like the most about taking your psychology class?

Jarvis: When considering what is rewarding about teaching psychology, I would have to say, the day to day “ah has” and the ongoing “teachable moments” that continually occur. A standout memory is of a particular student who desperately wanted to drop AP Psychology, fearing that the class was much too difficult for her. None of her family members had ever graduated from high school, let alone attempted a college class with success. She stayed in the course, with much daily guidance. Imagine her overwhelming joy as she
passed the class, graduated from high school, and went on to take college classes. She later expressed that her successful completion of the AP Psychology class gave her the confidence to take more college classes. She left high school with a stronger willingness to explore diligent challenges and understand the benefits of them. This experience will forever impact the quality of her life!

The students seem to enjoy the blend of theory and practical applications of a psychology course. There are endless hands-on activities that bring psychology to life for them. “Psychology Is Everywhere” is my motto! It is my privilege and passion to continually demonstrate this reality to them.

KATHERINE (KAY) MINTER  
Westwood High School  
Austin, TX

Smith: Tell us about yourself. How long have you been teaching? Where did you come from, or have you been at this school for your whole career? What type of psychology courses do you have—general or AP? Do you have any special psychology programs like fairs or other activities?

Minter: I’ve been teaching for 22 years, falling into it as a professional counselor with an undergraduate major in psychology and English and a teaching certificate “to fall back on.” I began teaching middle school language arts but found my niche as a high school teacher of English and regular psychology. I was shocked by the “fluff” of the regular psychology curriculum I was given 20 years ago and sad that all those previous students missed the really fun stuff of which our science is made. I’ve always taught both English and psychology and value the fact that each year I have both “Regular” and “AP/IB/Gifted” students—so I teach the entire spectrum of our student body—10th through 12th—through my courses every day. I love that!

Smith: What do you like the most about teaching psychology compared to some other subjects you have taught? Give some examples of specific reasons you like or love teaching psychology.

Minter: As a teacher of psychology, I feel that I am giving a “public service announcement” every single day I teach! In what other field can I teach about how life begins, how we develop healthily or not; how we grow intellectually, socially, morally; how we act and react toward others; how we are and are not affected by our environments; and how we process our world into a reality. No one who has experienced this kind of connection to students and to a field of study would ever want to leave the dynamics of a living, breathing, pulsing classroom.

Smith: Talk about one of your most exciting or rewarding experiences with students or a student, from the viewpoint of the student experience. It could be an individual experience, or a lesson or educational plan that you used that met or went beyond your expectations. What do the students like the most about taking your psychology class?

Minter: One of my greatest teachers was a special-needs student I had one year who asked if I would let her into my AP Psychology class (of course I would—I am an advocate for equal access for students who desire to try). Her name was “Erin,” and she was a hard worker but struggled hard to make Ds and Cs. I was pleased to find that Erin had signed up for the AP exam, though she was worried that she wouldn’t “pass.” I was also worried. In August, Erin came by my room to excitedly ask if I had seen her AP Exam score. She was bursting with pride! I had not recalled Erin’s score, so I asked her what she’d made. “Oh, Mrs. Minter! I made a ‘2’ and I thought I’d make a ‘1’—I know I can do college work now, and I’m going to go to college when I graduate.” My heart stopped and tears welled. Who was I to hold ‘3’ as a standard? A ‘2’ is not “passing” in the eyes of many, but a ‘2’ for Erin—and thereafter for me—is passing with flying colors, and this is what teaching is all about. Since that day, whether it be AP or IB, any exam “score” ranks LAST in my Top 10 reasons for taking psychology.

ALLYSON WESLEY, EdD  
Roslyn High School  
Roslyn, NY

Smith: Tell us about yourself. How long have you been teaching? Where did you come from, or have you been at this school for your whole career? What type of psychology courses do you have—general or AP? Do you have any special psychology programs like fairs or other activities?

Weseley: This past year was my 18th year teaching, and my 14th teaching AP Psychology. I’ve been at Roslyn High School ever since I graduated college. Although I majored in psychology at Princeton, there was no opening to teach psychology at the school where I was hired. When the College Board introduced an AP course in psychology a few years later, our school decided to offer it and asked me to teach it.

In addition to teaching AP Psychology, I run our school’s research program, and I mentor students working on behavioral science projects for entry into contests like the Intel Science Talent Search, Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, and Young Epidemiology Scholars Contest.
Smith: What do you like the most about teaching psychology compared to some other subjects you’ve taught? Give some examples of specific reasons you like or love teaching psychology.

Weseley: I love how relevant psychology is to students’ lives. Students often share how they are applying what we learned in class to their lives, and many parents report that their kids tell them about what we’ve been learning.

I also derive a lot pleasure from mentoring students on their independent research projects. Since students design projects based on their own interests and the background literature they read, I’m always learning something new. In order to help them, I constantly have to deepen and broaden my knowledge base. In addition, I really enjoy working with students over multiple years and watching them grow and mature both intellectually and personally.

I’m also pleased by the number of former students who contact me to say that they are pursuing careers related to psychology. I think this underscores the importance of involving students in the study of psychology at the high school level.

Smith: Talk about one of your most exciting or rewarding experiences with students or a student, from the viewpoint of the student experience. It could be an individual experience, or a lesson or educational plan that you used that met or went beyond your expectations. What do the students like the most about taking your psychology class?

Weseley: In AP Psychology, students always say they enjoy the demonstrations and the games the most, and I think these can be effective learning tools, especially for units students find challenging. One of my students’ favorites involves a demonstration of neural firing in which a line of students represents the neuron and the last one has a spray bottle of water representing neurotransmitters. They also love a review game we play at the end of the year that I call “Psychologist Celebrity” in which students draw names of famous psychologists out of a hat and then give clues to their teammates who try to identify the psychologist being described.

I do a lot of demonstrations in which I mask the purpose of what I’m asking the students to do in order to illustrate various psychological principles (e.g., depth of processing theory, just world bias, the Barnum effect). They seem to relish trying to figure out the purpose, and it’s almost like you can see all the pieces clicking into place in their minds as they think about it.

In terms of what’s most rewarding, I like to see students who begin the year struggling and end up excelling in the class. I find that many students come to the class without an understanding of effective study methods. I spend some time at the beginning of the year trying to teach these, and for some students, it makes a dramatic difference.

In research, it’s rewarding to see how proud students are when they complete their projects. At the outset, the prospect of designing, carrying out, and writing up one’s own study over the course of a couple of years seems daunting to most. The process involves tremendous work, more than they have encountered in virtually any other academic endeavor up to this point. When they are finished, it’s fantastic to watch them talk to people about the work they have done.

APA PT@CC TEACHING TIPS CONTEST

The APA Committee of Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges (PT@CC) invites faculty to participate in the PT@CC Teaching Tips Contest. Through the Teaching Tips Contest, PT@CC wants to encourage the sharing of instructional techniques such as original demonstrations, class activities, interactive teaching modules, or other pedagogy designed to illustrate a psychological concept or theory. To learn more about the Teaching Tips Contest, check the PT@CC Web site:

www.apa.org/ed/pcue/ptatcchome.html

DEADLINE: MAY 1, 2009
Earlier in my teaching career at Prince George’s Community College, I had an opportunity to engage in a curricular reform project that was funded by the National Science Foundation. The purpose of the project was to support institutional reform through faculty teamwork. This was a 2-year grant project that included faculty teams from the social sciences as well as from the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) areas of the college. There were two faculty teams: Alpha and Beta. I was a member of the Alpha team and was instructed to create a project that would involve faculty from the STEM areas of the college.

I began conversations with faculty members in two STEM areas: mathematics and genetics. These conversations led to some of the most stimulating discussions about how to teach psychology as a science. I often reflect on how much I learned from my colleagues about their disciplines and how much our conversations might have influenced their perception of the discipline of psychology. I was always curious to know if they perceived psychology as a science and how they might relate the science of psychology to their teaching. At the end of the project it was clear to each of us that our students would benefit from our experiences as team members and that we could strengthen their undergraduate experience by demonstrating through teaching how our disciplines were related.

I became so engaged in this project that I decided to complete a short course on the Human Genome Project. This experience allowed me to infuse knowledge acquired in this course into my lectures and to share the findings from cutting-edge research on the Human Genome Project with students who had questions about how genes influence behavior. When I took this course, I was only one of two psychologists enrolled in the session, and I spent my afternoons interacting with microbiologists and geneticists about the subject matter of the course. This experience was second to none in terms of how much new information I was able to learn and incorporate into my teaching. I was simply amazed by the wealth of information that had been accumulated by these scientists in such a short span of time. I strongly encourage teachers of psychology to take advantage of these types of professional development opportunities. To learn more about educational resources available on the Human Genome Project, please visit http://www.genome.gov/Education.

My conversations with my colleague in mathematics made me think about the quantitative reasoning skills that students enrolled in psychology courses gain through these courses. As a result, I developed a teaching module on numbers and their meaning for my introductory psychology course. During this time, I began to talk to my colleagues in the Department of Psychology about working with faculty in the math department to increase the quantitative literacy of our students. I vividly remember sitting in one of the mathematics laboratories and exploring the possibility of students enrolled in introductory psychology courses learning how to use statistical software packages. I firmly believe that if our students could learn how to use such software, they would become intrigued about how to collect and analyze data to support their hypotheses about human behavior.

After working with Beta team members for more than a year, I was armed with new knowledge from two disciplines and assured that I would be teaching psychology courses in a whole new way. It was clear to me that our students need to understand how the science of psychology is related to other disciplines and how taking psychology courses prepares them for practically any career path. Our students often do not make the connections between their courses because we do not generally teach our courses to demonstrate this relatedness. We must be intentional in our teaching if these connections are to be made and clear about what our goals are in this regard at the beginning of our courses. Once students make these connections, it is easier for them to see why certain courses are required as well as recommended for various curricular programs.
Making these connections also helps our students learn new skills that will assist them with their aspirations. For example, students who are interested in pursuing careers as psychologists will be required to conduct research both before and after completing their graduate education. The new paradigm for graduate education and training in psychology fosters interdisciplinary studies and research collaborations. Students who make connections among the sciences earlier in their academic careers are at a distinct advantage over students who do not have these experiences when they begin their graduate training, although these latter students will have this same exposure once they begin their graduate education.

Since working in teams and demonstrating the interdisciplinary perspective of research is the zeitgeist for the contemporary researcher, our students will be required to work with colleagues from other disciplines who propose a different viewpoint for examining behavior and gaining new knowledge. What better way to prepare our students today for the challenges ahead than to model in our courses what this will look like in future? By working in faculty teams to prepare teaching modules and resources for our courses, we achieve two major goals: We teach our colleagues from other disciplines that psychology is a science, and we demonstrate to our students the interdisciplinary nature of our discipline.

From this experience I learned the importance of getting to know my colleagues outside of my discipline and that I need to be exposed to teaching strategies from other disciplines. Although there was considerable overlap in our instructional techniques, there were also differences that made me think about alternative ways to present the subject matter in class. This experience helped me cultivate my teaching skills and explore additional professional development opportunities.

I am confident that every veteran teacher has had ample opportunity to work with his or her colleagues in other areas of school or college. I am equally confident that the students enrolled in these types of courses, unlike their peers who have not had this experience, make connections and enjoy an integrated learning experience. The higher education community is responding to the need for our students to have integrated learning experiences and is paving the way for these kinds of experiences by sharing purposive pathways for achieving them. To learn more about these types of experiences, please visit the Web site of the Association of American Colleges and Universities at www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-sp07/featurefour.cfm.

I encourage new teachers and veteran teachers who have had similar experiences in their teaching to share these insights with their colleagues. It is always refreshing to learn new strategies for teaching and assessing in the classroom. Teaching psychology from an interdisciplinary perspective is just one of many ways to achieve this goal.
DIVERSITY PROJECT 2000 AND BEYOND (DP2kB)
Psychology for a Global Community

A leadership and mentoring program designed for ethnic minority honor students attending community colleges

Coordinated with the American Psychological Association Annual Convention
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
August 4–7, 2009

The mission of DP2kB is to encourage ethnic minority honor students at the community college level to become professional psychologists in the areas of practice, education, or research.

DP2kB occurs 2 days prior to and 2 days during the APA convention and offers full grants for out-of-state students and partial grants for local students admitted into the program.

Qualifications for student participants:
• Enrolled in transfer courses at a community college
• Overall GPA of 3.0 or above (Psi Beta member or qualified to be one)
• Grade of A or B in general psychology (Psi Beta member or qualified to be one)
• Interest in learning about career opportunities in psychology
• Willing to attend the entire program (2-days) and APA convention (2 days) and closing evening reception

Funding is available for student participants who represent one of the following ethnic minority groups (in alphabetical order):
• African American
• American Indian
• Asian/Pacific Islander
• Hispanic/Latino

“I’m in my third year of serving as the codirector for DP2kB. This program has taught me what it means to be a leader and to mentor students of color who are interested in becoming professional psychologists.”
—Sonali Gonzalez, DP2kB alumna, 2001

“I can’t describe what DP2kB did for me other than to say WOW. I met psychologists of color from all over the country and I knew I wanted to become one of them. DP2kB inspired me to pursue a career in physiological psychology.”
—Orville Jackson, PhD, DP2kB alumnus, 1994

“DP2kB changed my life and transformed me from a community college student to a PsyD-level psychologist who is actively serving the American Indian community.”
—Tawa Witko, PhD, DP2kB alumna, 1994

For more information or to apply to DP2kB, please visit the Psi Beta Web site and click on Events: www.psibeta.org

NONHUMAN ANIMAL RESEARCH DVD RELEASED

The APA Committee on Animal Research and Ethics (CARE) has released a DVD containing two new segments in its video series on the contributions of nonhuman animal research within basic and applied behavioral science:

• Recovery of Function—highlights research on learning and plasticity, focusing on the recovery of motor functions lost as the result of neural damage following injury to the brain or spinal cord.
• Significance of Touch—examines nonhuman animal research that reveals the primary role of physical touch and contact in healthy behavioral development throughout the life span.

The DVD also includes an older segment titled Psychopharmacology. Teachers’ study guides that elaborate on the research depicted in each of the three segments are included. Copies of the DVD may be obtained by contacting Kym Thornton in the Science Directorate at 202.336.6000 or kthornton@apa.org.
CALL FOR NOMINATIONS
TOPSS 2009 Elections

The mission of the APA Committee of Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (TOPSS) is to promote the scientific nature of introductory and advanced high school psychology; to meet curricular needs of secondary school teachers; and to provide opportunities for high school students to be recognized and rewarded for their academic excellence. If you would like to become more involved in TOPSS and are interested in gaining leadership experience and having a positive impact on the teaching of high school psychology, we encourage you to consider serving on the TOPSS Committee. In 2009, the following three elected positions will be filled:

• Chair-Elect
• Member-at-Large
• Membership Coordinator

The Chair position is a 3-year position; the others are 2-year positions. Please consider nominating a colleague who would make a positive impact. Self-nominations are also welcomed.

Descriptions of officer responsibilities and sample platform statements are available on the TOPSS Web site. The TOPSS Committee meets twice a year, in spring and fall, in Washington, DC. APA covers travel and accommodation expenses.

Nominees for the 2009 TOPSS Election are asked to submit the following materials/documents:

• Vita or résumé
• Platform statement (examples are on the TOPSS Web site)
• Photo

Nominations are due by June 1, 2009.

Please send nominations and materials to Jewel Beamon, APA Education Directorate, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242. Electronic submissions will be accepted. Please send electronic files of nomination materials to Jewel Beamon at jbeamon@apa.org.

For more information, please visit the TOPSS Web site: www.apa.org/ed/topss/homepage.html

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS
PT@CC 2009 Elections

Consider serving on the APA Committee of Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges (PT@CC) Committee! The PT@CC Committee consists of six members whose mission is to:

• Promote, within the 2-year college community, the highest professional standards for teaching of psychology as a scientific discipline
• Cultivate a professional identity with the discipline of psychology among psychology teachers at community colleges
• Develop leadership qualities among psychology teachers at community colleges and increase their participation and representation in professional psychology activities and organizations
• Establish and maintain communication with all groups involved in the teaching of psychology and with the greater psychological community

• Encourage psychological research on teaching and learning at community colleges for the purpose of giving students the best possible educational opportunities

The members of PT@CC will elect two new members, who will join the committee in January 2010 for 3-year terms of office. The PT@CC Committee meets twice a year in Washington, DC. APA covers travel and accommodation expenses.

Consider self-nominating for a position on the PT@CC Committee or nominate a colleague who would make a positive impact. Candidates must be current members of PT@CC. Nominations are due by June 1, 2009.

Nominees for the 2009 PT@CC election must submit the following materials/documents: curriculum vitae, brief personal statement, and a photo. Please send to PT@CC Elections, APA Education Directorate, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242. Please send electronic files of nomination materials to Martha Boenau at mboenau@apa.org.
MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

2009 APA/Clark University Workshop With Extended Summer Institute for Master Teachers

July 12–17, 2009

The fifth annual APA/Clark University Workshop for High School Teachers will be held at Clark University in Worcester, MA, from Sunday, July 12, through Friday, July 17. This year, the workshop schedule has been expanded to include a 2-day Summer Institute for master teachers to develop TOPSS unit lesson plans on the topics covered during the 3-day workshop. Due to limited funding, the Summer Institute is an invitation-only program that is highly competitive and designed as a working meeting. All interested high school psychology teachers are invited to apply. Workshop facilitators will include Clark University psychology professors and high school teachers from APA TOPSS. Housing in the Clark campus dorms and materials will be provided for all participants. Participants will also receive travel stipends of $100.

Application forms and additional information about the 2009 workshop are available online:


The application deadline is April 15, 2009.

This workshop is sponsored by the American Psychological Foundation, Clark University, and APA, with generous support from Lee Gurel, PhD. Please contact Martha Boenau at mboenau@apa.org or (202) 336-6140 if you have any questions.