Jeni L. Burnette
Teaching Statement

Teaching is central to my career as an academic psychologist. In this statement, I elaborate on three issues surrounding my teaching: (a) my teaching qualifications and evaluation summaries, (b) my beliefs about what factors are essential toward facilitating student learning, and (c) my teaching goals. I incorporate student comments from anonymous end-of-semester evaluations where appropriate.

Teaching Experience and Qualifications

I have had the privilege of teaching in a variety of environments with diverse students. At Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), I taught graduate statistics courses and worked as the Program Director for the Center for the Advancement of Methods and Analyses. Courses which I have taught include advanced methodological and statistics topics, multiple regression lab, design and analysis lab, and an SEM lab. I also taught applied and basic social psychology research methods and analyses as well as introductory statistics courses at the University of Richmond.

My substantive courses include basic and applied social psychology as well as a seminar on the self and relationships. I taught basic social psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University where classes were large and had a diverse student population. I taught applied social psychology and a graduate seminar on the self and relationships at the University of Richmond, where I have had the opportunity to work with smaller classes and develop my skills as a facilitator of class discussion. Regardless of class size, I aim to engage students in the process of learning, to challenge them, and to encourage critical thinking.

In addition to my formal teaching assignments, I have directly supervised undergraduate research assistants (approximately 30 students in lab groups ranging from 2 to 10 students) and served as the advisor on honors theses (3 students). I have found my research investigating close relationships and self-regulation to be appealing to many students. I plan to continue involving students in my research as I value these mentoring relationships.

In conclusion, I relish opportunities to continue to develop my skills as a teacher. Beyond the courses mentioned above, I feel qualified to develop courses in other areas, including, but not limited to, introductory psychology, interpersonal relationships, the self, health psychology, and group dynamics. I am also open to and excited about the opportunity to develop new courses.

Teaching Evaluation Summary

Becoming an excellent teacher is a top priority for me. On VCU’s standard course evaluation form, students have rated me substantially above the mean on the particularly diagnostic question, “How would you rate this instructor?” With a score of five representing outstanding and 4 representing very good, across my classes, I have received an average score of 4.7. At VCU, I was awarded the “Graduate Student Teaching Award” in 2005 in recognition of my teaching. At the University of Richmond, on their standard 12-item course evaluation form, students have rated me significantly above the mean across classes on the diagnostic statement, “The quality of teaching in this course was very good.” With a score of five representing strongly agree and four representing agree, my mean score of 4.3 illustrates student’s positive evaluations. Students consistently cite my availability, knowledge, organization, appreciation for diversity in culture and learning styles, and enthusiasm as strengths. (Please refer to page 4 for a complete summary of my teaching evaluations from the University of Richmond).
Teaching Philosophy

As I encourage and facilitate learning, the main tenets of my teaching philosophy include: (a) increasing students’ ability and desire to think critically and deeply about themselves and the society in which they live, (b) encouraging appreciation of diversity, and (c) fostering curiosity. In reaching these goals, I aim to enhance the student’s motivation and ability to continue learning after leaving the classroom. I summarize the foundations of my teaching philosophy in what I call my “ABC’s” of teaching.

**Appreciation for the student as an active agent in learning.** Empowering students and giving them responsibility can aid in the learning process. I see my task as a teacher as one of assisting students in the development of their own conceptualizations of theories and ideas that can aid in additional learning and thinking. I encourage an understanding of the relationships among theory, research, and application. I do this through didactic, laboratory, and hands on training experiences and assignments that apply critical concepts and require critical thinking.

> “Dr. Burnette is a fantastic teacher. Lectures were clear and engaging, and the tests were very fair. I would gladly take another class with Dr. Burnette. She knows the subject matter and does a great job of making the information within the class relevant and accessible.”

> “The class was challenging but she did not make it overly difficult. Also she tried and succeeded at varying the activities and ways of teaching so that the subject matter was taught in a better way.”

**Belief in students’ ability to learn.** As an educator, I teach students to think critically, become independent learners and, most of all, respect and appreciate learning. If students are struggling with learning, I explore various techniques for presenting key concepts. What works for some students may not work for others and appreciation for diversity within a classroom can be exhibited by approaching learning from multiple perspectives. Although I challenge students, I establish a system in which students feel confident that, with hard work, they can indeed learn and improve. A few ways in which I try to enable students to be more confident is by making personal contact with students and being accessible.

> “Dr. Burnette made the material applicable and relatable to outside disciplines and subdisciplines. She also made information easy to understand, and did well in motivating students to perform.”

> “Dr. Burnette is great! Given the nature of the material it is difficult to make it interesting, but Dr. Burnette made the class very engaging and mixed up teaching methods so that the class was never dull. She is very understanding and helpful! I would above and beyond recommend her as a professor for friends.”

**Commitment to learning and teaching.** I strive to foster learning environments that are stimulating, motivating, supportive, and engaging. In attaining this goal, I am committed to consistently improving my skills as a teacher. I also find that conducting research not only renews my enthusiasm for the field, but also helps me stay current on relevant findings and new statistical issues that are of interest and importance to the students. In my commitment to becoming a better instructor, I subscribe to teaching newsletters, attend conferences aimed at improving teaching and disseminating ideas, and read journals publishing research on teaching pedagogy.

> “She was always ready for class and kept classes interesting with powerpoints, videos, discussions, and handouts. I always felt involved in class. She is a dynamic professor who used a variety of teaching techniques.”
Teaching Goals

To Encourage Appreciation of Diversity
Appreciation of diversity in cultures and learning styles can enhance student’s classroom experience. I strive to foster an acceptance of various perspectives and experiences to improve the learning environment. Diversity in the classrooms can help to educate students and encourage them to examine their assumptions and broaden their perspectives.

“She was understanding and helped organize the class so everyone of different levels of statistical background could learn. The instructor made a strong effort to accommodate our different learning styles.”

“Dr. Burnette is a fantastic teacher. She takes a genuine interest in her students and is very understanding of our problems inside and outside of class.”

To Be Prepared and Make Material Comprehensible
I strive to present core concepts in a lucid, organized fashion. To maximize structure and coherence, I distribute outlines of each topic to the students and often send summary emails to the class at the end of each week. Examples of my teaching materials (e.g., syllabus) can be obtained on my web page (http://www.richmond.edu/~jburnet2).

“Jeni is an excellent instructor. She is very organized and knowledgeable and puts a lot of time into preparing. She shows a genuine interest in us, is approachable, and cares if we understand the material.”

“The instructor was always great at explaining difficult concepts. I’ve enjoyed the course.”

To Encourage Students to be Active Learners & Critical Thinkers
I aim to involve students in their learning and to challenge them to think critically and be inquisitive. Teaching is not a linear one-way delivery of knowledge. Rather, it is an interactive process that requires adapting to varying perspectives, changing content, and student input.

“The instructor involved us as much as possible with the material, which I believe had a positive effect on our learning of the material.”

To Be Available to Students
The most personally rewarding aspects of teaching for me are (a) class discussions in which students feel comfortable to speak their minds freely and (b) one-on-one discussions where I can help a student with course work or other professional concerns.

“Professor Burnette is a great professor who is really in touch with and responsive to student concerns and questions. She is very approachable and easy to talk with.”

Concluding Comment
In trying to fulfill these goals, I find teaching to be both demanding and invigorating. My advisor, Donelson Forsyth, states in the final words of his book on teaching: “Psychologically healthy people constantly reflect on their potentialities, set new aspirations, deepen their self-understanding, and strive towards perfection. And so it is for the teaching psychologist.” I aspire to be a great teacher who not only disseminates knowledge, but also one who inspires learning.
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<th>Teacher Well Prepared</th>
<th>Discussion Effectively Guided</th>
<th>Stimulated Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Teacher Receptive to Students</th>
<th>Clear and Understandable</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Course Increased Knowledge</th>
<th>Fair Grading</th>
<th>Helpful on Work</th>
<th>Challenging Course</th>
<th>Quality of Teaching</th>
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Note. Responses are on a 1-5 scale. All evaluations that I have received from the University of Richmond appear in the above table. Virginia Commonwealth University evaluations are not included in this table because only one item on their evaluation form pertains to my teaching. I received an average score of 4.7 on VCU’s question regarding my teaching, “How would you rate this instructor?” Complete evaluations are available upon request.
Please summarize in a paragraph or two your evaluation of this teacher:

- The teacher was always very well prepared. She is very smart and a delight to be in class with. She is well organized and clearly laid out what was expected of us. She facilitated discussion when needed.

- The teacher was excellent in this course and really knew all about the different topics. She also brought in other resources and made the class discussions interesting by encouraging other perspectives, videos, etc. She also provided good feedback and was always willing to help outside of the classroom in finding extra resources for discussions and papers.

- Dr. Burnette is an amazing teacher. Not only is she extremely knowledgeable on the subject of the class, but she guided discussions effectively and I can honestly say I was never bored or uninterested. We were assigned an appropriate amount of work and never felt burdened. I would definitely recommend Dr. Burnette to others, she is a wonderful teacher.

- Jeni is one of the best teachers I've had. She really seems to enjoy hearing what each student has to say and always gives us positive feedback on our ideas. She was helpful both inside and outside class and seemed genuinely interested in seeing each one of us succeed. I would definitely recommend her to others!

- Dr. Burnette really cares about student input and comments. She encourages feedback and incorporates it in structuring the class. She also respects students and tries to ensure they are getting what they want out of the course.

- Dr. Burnette is a phenomenal teacher who is very hands on with her students. Her effort and enthusiasm throughout this course was nothing short of exemplary. I believe that she puts forward a perfect balance of teaching and letting the students interact and attempt to re-organize their thoughts and what they are learning in the best way possible for them. I would take her again and recommend her to anyone in a heartbeat.

- Dr. Burnette is an excellent professor with a strong grasp of the material. She was always able to convey the information clearly and ensured every student understood. In addition, she was very understanding with student concerns and flexible with regards to requests. She always made time to help students outside of class and could be always be found in her office. For a professor with relatively few years of experience compared to others in the department, Dr. Burnette did a fantastic job. I would, and have, recommend her to others.

- Jeni is awesome. She's very knowledgeable and truly wants her students to learn. She is incredibly helpful in and outside of class. She develops a good relationship with students and encourages group learning in the class for an overall awesome classroom environment.