Teaching Statement

My philosophy of teaching is based on the belief that each learning context presents at least two distinct but related educational opportunities. For example, although both traditional courses and clinical supervision require thoughtful attention to content and skills, ultimately every instructional situation should also be structured to support the larger goal of students’ professional development. Thus, in my teaching I aim to set high expectations for my students and myself in terms of the intellectual quality of our efforts, while also attending to aspects of the teaching process that will best support students’ broader professional growth.

Undergraduate Teaching

I see myself as having two primary teaching roles at the undergraduate level—teaching Brain and Behavior, and mentoring the research assistants who help in my lab. In Brain and Behavior, I try to incorporate my teaching philosophy in several ways. Since the material can be more technical than some Psychology majors have encountered to that point in their education, I try to set students’ expectations that doing well in the course will require them to work with concepts that are often more familiar in biology, physics, chemistry, and even philosophy at times. At the same time, I feel it is incumbent on me to present the material in a compelling and accessible way. In part, I try to accomplish that by frequently integrating neurological and psychiatric case examples, video and other media, and in-class experiments and demonstrations. More broadly however, I hope to convey my own enthusiasm for the subject matter, by presenting the view that it is ultimately by embracing the more technical content that one gains a full appreciation of the marvel of the nervous system. Last, like any course, I see Brain and Behavior as an opportunity to teach larger lessons about the basic principles of scientific inquiry and critical thinking. To that end, I try to pose provocative questions, challenge students to identify problems or gaps in our current theories, and find links to other disciplines and their own experiences. Going forward, I hope to further enhance this course by integrating more creative instructional elements (such as an optional “Art and Neuroscience” assignment) as well as peer instruction.

I also see my interactions with the undergraduate RAs in my lab as an important part of my contribution to the University’s teaching mission. It is particularly satisfying to introduce students to practical aspects of the scientific process in the course of advising their undergraduate research. To date, I have been fortunate to supervise three UROP-funded projects awarded to students in my lab, which have included both Psychology Honors Theses and a Senior Project in Biomedical Engineering. It is fulfilling to assist students in translating the abstract concepts discussed in their courses and our lab into concrete projects where they take ownership over the study’s design and execution. In supervising these projects, I have come to the belief that the experience and self-knowledge students gain in overcoming the associated practical challenges is at least as valuable to their future endeavors as the intellectual and technical skills they develop.
Graduate Teaching and Clinical Supervision
My role in graduate teaching thus far has principally involved instruction of the Neuropsychology Pre-Practicum, Practicum, and Supervision sequence, which collectively comprise the Neuropsychology Vertical Team. I believe this instructional model in which all the students participate together with faculty in a vertically-organized supervisory team is an especially unique strength of our program—I just wish I could take credit for its design! While I have heartily enjoyed the opportunity to present the substantive content of clinical neuropsychology during the didactic Pre-practicum, I especially relish the opportunities that arise during the course of the clinical practicum itself. Due to the flexibility of the instructional model, the course provides the opportunity for content-based instruction, professional development discussions, clinical service delivery and supervision, mock case presentations, and colloquia with other neuropsychologists in the community.

In addition to maintaining these rich intellectual experiences, I am simultaneously aware of my overarching obligation to facilitate students’ emerging professional identities as clinical scientists. By the time each student leaves our program, it is my goal that they will have a firm appreciation of the gravity of clinical obligations, as well the professionalism and skills to carry them out ethically, confidently, and at the highest standards of practice. To that end, I see my role as a supervisor as being to foster an open and mutually engaged environment that balances development of students’ autonomy with rigorous but respectful oversight, in the course of delivering excellent care.

Future Teaching Plans
In the years to come, there are a number of courses that I look forward to teaching. At the graduate level, I am eager to take on Principles and Techniques of Assessment I in Fall 2015. Given the strong focus on intelligence in my research, I am excited for the opportunity to continually integrate the latest theoretical and clinical considerations pertinent to cognitive assessment into the course, as well as for the positive synergy it will likely have with my research. In the following 1-2 years I am also planning to teach graduate Functional Neuroanatomy, which I hope to develop into a truly outstanding course. Providing strong coverage of such a large and complex topic will be an exciting and daunting challenge, and I look forward to developing a rigorous course that will be equally challenging and stimulating for our students. I have already begun developing the syllabus in light of the preparatory demands I anticipate, which includes plans for interactive MRI-based examinations, use of anatomical slides or specimens, and writing assignments germane to each student’s research.

Last, given our department’s growing strength in human electrophysiology, and the interest in possibly developing shared space for physiological research, I would be keen to participate in ongoing discussions about how such a space might be used to enhance our curriculum. I am excited by the suggestions for possibly developing new seminars or adding laboratory components to our existing courses, and would look forward to contributing to those goals.