Jeanine Stefanucci: Teaching/Mentoring Statement

Above all, when I teach and mentor I try to let the students know that I care about their success. I believe that finding new and different ways of presenting concepts allows students to gain knowledge and enjoy learning. I also hope that my eagerness to engage them as individuals broadens their understanding of the material and my own understanding of how to foster it. My goal as a teacher is to reach out to every student whether inside or outside of the classroom. My goal as a mentor is to advance my students to the career they desire. To that end, I present information and mentor in diverse ways so to connect with students who differ in learning styles, needs, and familiarity with the material.

Teaching in the Classroom

While at the University of Utah, I have taught two courses required for Human Factors certificate students: Human Performance and Engineering and Human Factors. I also offered a new upper-level seminar for the department, Introduction to Cognitive Science, which is now an Honors course as well. I taught two large service courses, Psychology as a Profession and a Science and Introduction to Sensation and Perception, to over 700 students (half of whom were enrolled online). I have also developed a graduate-level seminar on emotion and cognition and human-computer interaction, both of which draw students from other departments at Utah.

Whenever possible, I use novel technologies in the classroom, which allow me to meet individual learning needs and to portray the material in a variety of ways. As a graduate student, I received a fellowship from Microsoft to explore the effectiveness of using Tablet PCs (laptop computers that allow one to write on the screen, rather than type) in the classroom. At the time I was a teaching assistant for my advisor’s large introductory class on perception, and I took lecture notes with a Tablet PC. I placed my notes on the web for students to download as an example of both how they could take better notes in class and integrate these notes with the professor’s slides (which were embedded in my Tablet notes and annotated). I believe that learning how to dynamically organize notes outside of the classroom strengthens students’ understanding of the relationships between concepts presented in lecture better than mere memorization of the facts. In all of my classes at Utah I teach good note-taking habits and reasons why just “reading over” your notes will not guarantee that the material is recalled or learned. I use demonstrations from the study of long-term memory to help make the case for using deep, semantic processing when studying. I ask students to bring their notes to our meetings outside of class so that I can guide their habits on an individual basis too.

While at the College of William & Mary, I incorporated response systems (e.g., “clickers”) in my Introduction to Cognitive Science course. I believe these technologies enhance student learning, but I hope to do more assessment in the future to support this claim. In addition, I am quite interested in the national movement toward online classes (my large service courses include over 100 online students when I teach them), but more information is needed to assess whether the online students learn as much and receive the guidance they need to succeed. Future studies should evaluate the effectiveness of videotaping classes posted online as compared to canned video lectures or slide presentations. I am involved in committee work within our department to try to better understand how to develop such hybrid courses to support online learning. Overall, the use of multimedia both in the classroom and online interests me because I believe we will have to address personalizing the education that will be delivered to many students now and in the future for it to be most effective.
Teaching Out of the Classroom

At the University of Utah, I have graduated one Ph.D. student (Michael Geuss) who was my sole advisee. In addition, I have two Ph.D. students (Kyle Gagnon and David Lessard) whom I jointly advise with my colleague, Sarah Creem-Regehr. Two new Ph.D. students are joining our research group this fall (2014). One will be solely advised by me (Devin Gill) and the other (Erica Barhorst) will be joint advised by myself and Sarah Creem-Regehr. I have served on two Master’s committees for the School of Computing and am on the committee for a Ph.D. student in Computer Science who is currently in our research group (Kaushik Satyavolu). In addition, I have served on a Ph.D. committee in the school of nursing and the school of business. I have had over 75 undergraduate students conduct research in my laboratory across institutions, including five senior students who completed an honor’s thesis project with me at Utah. I feel interacting with and teaching the students how to conduct research is one of the most rewarding and important parts of my job. To that end, I have submitted papers and conference presentations with many undergraduate students (both at Utah and at the College of William & Mary), and all of them learned how to design experiments, analyze data, and write for publication. As you will see on my vita, many of these projects have been published and/or resulted in grant funding for research or for the students to further their educations. I could not be more proud of the students who have worked with me.

In response to requests from many graduate students in the cognitive area of my department, I designed and implemented a discussion group for professional issues that began in the summer of 2010. To my delight, I covered topics not only helpful to the students but also helpful to me! For example, we discussed how to write more effectively and stick to a schedule, and about how to better manage work time when in the office. I continued the group for two more summers and discussed topics such as how to prepare for the job market, create an effective vitae, write teaching and research statements, and decide how and where to look for jobs and post-docs.

In addition to meeting with the graduate students, I run a summer professional issues meeting with undergraduates who plan to apply for graduate school in the fall. Many students have come to me in past years with concerns about the process of applying for graduate school. I realized that advising was necessary and offered to hold meetings in which we discussed searching for the right schools, writing personal statements, drafting vitae, and approaching recommendation writers. The students come prepared each week to share what they wrote and we edit their documents as a group so that we can learn from each other. I do not turn anyone away from the group and welcome their friends or fellow students whom I may not know. I am happy to report that the group reaches nearly 20 students each summer.

Future Directions

I am constantly honing my skills as an instructor and mentor, and I genuinely enjoy doing so. I am comfortable teaching and relish the moments when a class demonstration or lecture sparks interest in the students. My course evaluations at both the undergraduate and graduate level have been consistently above average. However, I know I can improve. I work hard to maintain a good, professional relationship with all of the students I mentor to keep their productivity high and to ensure timely completion of the program and theses. I was once asked in a job interview how I was going to “change the world.” I responded simply with “one student at a time.”