

## Philosophy of Teaching and Research Statement – Dr. Jamie Peterson, job search stage

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A professor once told me that as a counselor I was going to be a change agent. She said that not only was I going to be a change agent, but that I had a responsibility to inspire future change agents. It is my belief that I have the ability to be a change agent, to positively influence the academic community and the students with whom I work, that guide my teaching and research.

As a professor, my goal is to go beyond teaching content knowledge to affect real change in my students. I foster critical thinking skills, application, and problem-solving skills in order to change how students see, think about, and act in the world. I feel I am able to be a positive influence in their lives and inspire them to be change agents in their own lives as well.

My teaching methods reflect my optimistic view that students are motivated to learn, to master the content, to consistently improve, and to positively influence their lives and communities. I structure my classes to support mastery-oriented goals and evaluation practices, by providing students with a variety of challenging tasks with clearly defined goals, and focusing upon improvement when evaluating their work. I do this by using brief lectures, experiments, case studies, demonstrations, and cooperative learning to engage students and support their learning.

However, after teaching a variety of students I have learned that my optimism can be misleading as not all students are motivated to learn about psychology, nor do they want to be change agents! For this reason, I focus upon integrating psychology into students' lives and bringing the "real world" into the classroom. I often begin my lectures with a news article, video segment, or cartoon germane to the day's topic. By bringing the news and pop culture into the classroom students have some context in which they can think about the theories and research and see how psychology relates to their lives. Throughout the lesson, I encourage students to think about how their "book knowledge" applies to the real world, to question the adequacy of the theory or the research report, and, if appropriate, to apply the theory or research to solve an issue. Thus, I try to encourage students to think about how psychology can change their lives and lives of others.

I evaluate student learning by fostering critical thinking and application skills. Periodically, at the end of class I ask students to reflect upon a question that requires analyzing an issue or solving a problem. Students then write a "minute paper" that is graded according to the completeness and coherence of thought. These papers provide me with a way to gauge student learning on a daily basis. Further, I give students a choice as to how they demonstrate their learning at the end of each unit. Students have the option of completing tests individually; in small cooperative groups; or by taking the test, grading it themselves, and writing short reflections on their answers for additional points. By giving students a voice in how they are evaluated I hope to enhance their motivation to learn and perform well on the exams. Another example of how I assess student learning is with a "Psychology Journal." Students analyze psychological research by keeping a journal of articles related to psychology that they encounter in the media. Students analyze those articles with the knowledge they are gaining in the course and I grade these journal entries based upon the growth students make across the semester as they acquire more knowledge of psychology and research methods. This method of assessment encourages critical thinking about the "place" of psychology in students' lives and how psychology can induce both positive and negative changes in the world.

Teaching students to be change agents also requires teaching them to be open to diverse people and perspectives. Therefore, central to my goals as a professor is a strong respect for and appreciation of diversity. When I teach the history of the Psychology I discuss both how the

discipline has encouraged multiculturalism and sensitivity to diverse populations in addition to how it has harmed diverse groups of people. When evaluating research studies I ask students to consider whether a sample adequately represents everyone in the intended population, and whether a research method will be sensitive to and capture the diverse experiences of its participants. Finally, I encourage students to take another's perspective to critically examine the implications of research findings: what they mean to a variety of people, and how the findings can be used to both help and hurt diverse populations. By thoroughly integrating discussions of diversity into all of my lectures and classes, I illustrate to students that diversity is not an "add on" lecture at the end of a unit, but an integral and valuable part of our lives.

My research is also driven by my desire to be a change agent and to help others prepare students for their roles as in the world as well. As a professor, I hope to conduct a program of research that elucidates how faculty influence students and how the entire college community can positively influence students as well. Informal interaction with faculty is a potent form of student engagement that affects student intellectual and academic outcomes (e.g., Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Currently I am investigating how informal interactions between students and faculty are affected by student perceptions of professor power. I plan to continue to study perceptions of power and informal student-faculty interaction by examining areas such as faculty advising relationships and service learning programs. Further, I plan to focus my research on first-generation college students' academic and intellectual development, as these students are most at-risk for leaving college without completing a degree. I hope that my research will inform professors how they can have the greatest positive influence upon students, and teach professors how they can work with students more effectively.

I feel that I can make a positive contribution to St. Kate's students, faculty, and community because my philosophy of teaching and research goals align with the College's mission to lead and influence. I am interested in contributing my interest and research in social power, influence, and prejudice, as well as my experience teaching writing intensive courses to teach *The Reflective Woman* and the *Global Search for Justice* classes. Further, I am interested in creating classes that combine my interests in education and psychology, such as: conflict resolution and cooperative learning classes. I envision students in these classes partnering with the Centers for Excellence on campus to apply what students are learning in the classroom to help members of the local community. Another possible collaboration would be with the Education Department, helping to prepare future teachers with classes in human relations or multiculturalism.

In summary, I hope to contribute to your college's mission to educate women who will lead and influence through my teaching, research, and service. My student-centered and mastery-oriented philosophy of teaching supports St. Kate's mission by supporting student success inside the classroom, and my research on student-faculty interaction further supports student and faculty success outside of the classroom. I believe I would make a positive contribution and be a positive change agent at the College of Saint Catherine.

## 12 Years Later...

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Twelve years ago I wrote this statement on my philosophy of learning and teaching. I recall the agony of writing it – I thought I knew how to engage students effectively and I was eager to teach. I had a lot of great pedagogical tools and assignments that I was excited to use with students and I discussed many of them in this statement.

As I look back on this statement after teaching at St. Catherine for 11 years, I see some common themes that run through my old and new statements. I still firmly believe that I can educate students to lead and create change in this world, I am still optimistic about my students' desires to learn, and I still use some of the tools and strategies I described in the statement. However, my revised statement (the first I have written post-tenure) reveals a more cohesive and encompassing philosophy on how I engage students and how I create a positive learning environment for my students. I have felt fortunate and humbled to work with the women who have been in my classes and I have learned so much from them. I believe my revised philosophy reflects a greater depth of experience and reflection on how I authentically engage with students. More than pedagogical tools and strategies, relationships are essential, and this is a more central focus of my revised philosophy

My goal, as a teacher, is to create change. I want to change how my students think about themselves as learners, as individuals, and as citizens. It is my hope that students leave my class knowing more about psychology and how it can be applied to their lives, and I hope students leave my class knowing more about themselves and their own capacity to create change and be a critically thinking, reflective and compassionate leader in their communities. I do this by creating significant learning experiences (Fink, 2003) and by modeling these behaviors in my teaching.

In order to create significant learning experiences for students, I begin every class, every semester with my philosophy and my expectations for students and myself. By clearly describing my intentions and expectations for students and for myself, I believe we can begin the course together and work together more effectively. This also helps me begin to develop rapport with my students, and that rapport is absolutely essential to my teaching.

The first expectation I have for students, is for them to claim their educations as Adrienne Rich (1977) describes in her address to Douglass College. I need students to commit to working hard and making each and every class a meaningful use of our time. Second, I ask students to view challenges as opportunities to learn. When they are faced with a difficult task, I ask them to re-frame the task as not something that is hard or challenging, but an opportunity to learn something new and benefit from the experience and the learning. Third, I ask students to be willing to make mistakes. If we are afraid to make a mistake, we'll be too afraid to take on opportunities to learn and grow. A consistent mantra is my work is that "Mistakes are okay. Mistakes are how we learn". Fourth, I ask students to engage fully in their learning by asking questions - particularly critical questions. When students are invited to ask critical questions, and I openly explore the answers with them by modeling critical thinking and collaboration in finding answers – I de-center myself as "the expert" and allow the students' learning to take center stage as they build expertise. Finally, I expect students to be kind. When we are kind to one another and act under the assumption that we are working with good intentions, we create warm and inviting classrooms where students can feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes and asking questions.

After stating my expectations for students, I state what they can expect from me as the instructor. I tell them that they can expect me to create a respectful environment. If the students and I do not have a basic level of respect for one another, we cannot engage authentically and we cannot learn effectively. Second, I tell students they can expect me to be flexible. Some of the students at St. Kate's are the stereotypical college student many people believe attend a private college. The students have numerous privileges associated with their identities and culture and their primary focus is college. However, many of the students at St. Kate's are also nothing like the stereotypical private college student. They experience injustice on a daily basis because of their identities and culture, sometimes with significant commitments to their families and communities. For these students, they do not have the privilege of making college their primary focus. Therefore, flexibility is essential. Although I do not love emailing students what was missed in class, making up class sessions in office hours, grading late assignments and keeping up with some of my students' needs – a little flexibility can be invaluable to their learning. Flexibility shows them that I value and respect them, and that their learning is my focus.

Finally, I tell students they can expect me to fully engage them during each and every class session. Whenever I teach a course – whether the course is new to the department's curriculum

or just new to me, I begin by thinking backwards. Five years after the student finishes my course, what do I want her to know and be able to do? This “big question” guides how I develop the course. I create learning objectives that require students to work at the top of Bloom’s taxonomy – my expectation is that students come to class remembering and knowing the material I assigned outside of class so that we can spend our time together applying, evaluating and creating with the course content. I assess student learning by using authentic assessments. In five years, how will the students be using the knowledge, skills and abilities they acquire in my course? I use that to create an assessment that mirrors the real world application. As I design my courses and teach students, I am also transparent in all the decisions I make and practices I employ. I explain the rationale for my instructional decisions so that students understand not just what they need to do, but why I want them to do it and how I will evaluate their progress toward our shared goals.

After creating the learning objectives and assessments, I turn my attention to the activities in which my students and I will engage. How we pursue an answer to our big question matters greatly. In my classes, I consistently require students to apply their learning in real world situations. For instance, in my course Seminar I: Psychology Engages the World, students engage in a service-learning “internship” in which they work with a community partner by providing service for 2-3 hours a week, each week of the semester. Students reflect on their service in writing and in our class discussions. Further, students integrate what they learn about psychology with what they learned from their service to create a final project in which they use psychological research to answer a question for and share information with the community partner and/or their clients in a format that is approachable, engaging and accessible. In this class, students learn how to translate what they learn in the classroom to the real world, and they practice their ability to be critically thinking, reflective, compassionate leaders in the process.

Another example of how I engage students in developing their leadership skills is in the course Seminar II: Current Issues in Psychology. This class is one of the last courses students take in the major as they prepare to graduate. The course is a mixture of career preparation as well as a final look back at what students learned in psychology and how they can use it, regardless of where their careers may take them. In this class, we dig into some of the seminal studies in psychology. The majority of the seminal studies that included humans as participants were not at all inclusive, as the samples largely consisted of white, middle-class, male college students. The majority of the seminar studies also violated many of today’s ethical guidelines for research. Thus, we are able to explore the prevailing WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrializes, Rich, Democratic) science psychology is built upon and the ethical issues therein. Students have numerous opportunities to critically evaluate what we know in psychology, how what we know may be flawed, and how we need to change the field to be more ethical and inclusive. Students examine these questions by leading discussions and presenting work to lower division psychology students and the campus community – building their abilities to apply their knowledge and lead others in critical, reflective and compassionate thought and leadership.

In sum, I feel as though my big question, “How can I teach in such a way that students become critically thinking, reflective and compassionate leaders?” is answered a bit more each day as I reflect on my own practice and what I learn from my students. In the past 11 years, my practice of teaching has gotten richer, more meaningful, and more significant. I create safe, transparent spaces where my students and I can come together to take risks, make mistakes and learn from one another. And my hope is that students leave my classes knowing themselves and their capabilities better, and that they are empowered to be leaders in their communities.