

# TRAVIS J. CARTER

## STATEMENT OF TEACHING INTERESTS

I enjoy teaching a great deal, and it forms a large part of my desire to work in the academic world. Through working as a teaching assistant, teaching my own classes, and supervising undergraduate research, I have gained valuable experience that I look forward to applying in the classroom.

### TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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My teaching philosophy has two main components. First, I believe that it is vital for researchers to bring their skills and passion for theory and experimentation into the classroom. Second, I believe that learning should be an active process of discovery, not simply a bland act of memorization. Integrating these two ideas, I believe that courses should emphasize empiricism and challenge students to engage and evaluate the material with the eye of a critic. Just as researchers should always be thinking critically of experimental findings, so too should students not take anything as a given.

I have had excellent models in the professors of Cornell University, who integrate their extensive knowledge of research findings and the research process into a coherent and accessible lecture style. Although psychological theory is obviously a critical part of any course, I believe that the evidence the theory rests on is equally important. Too many people think that psychology as a field is closer to common sense than it is to science. In order for psychology to be taken seriously as a science, it must not only put forth theory, but also put empirical tests of critical hypotheses generated from those theories at the center of lessons. One cannot lose the forest for the trees, but without trees, we're left with an empty field.

My belief in empiricism informs my philosophy about involving students in the classroom. I believe that students should be encouraged to ask questions, to probe the bounds of the theories presented, and especially to question the evidence that it rests on. Education at all levels should not simply be about learning a specific set of facts, but also learning how to learn – how to think critically, how to synthesize and integrate information across multiple disciplines, how to approach any topic adroitly. Psychology is a perfect for such learning, as the boundaries between fields, disciplines, and even daily life are blurred. Students should come from the classroom excited to tell their friends their new insights, and explain how something they had long taken for granted works, or how some long-held belief is actually false.

I was able to exercise this philosophy while teaching an introductory social psychology course, as well as an undergraduate seminar on the social psychology of the “dark side of human nature” attached to the introductory psychology lecture course. In the latter class, each weekly meeting was a combination of lecture and discussion focused on applying social psychological theory to otherwise incomprehensible acts of inhumanity. I illustrated the theory with laboratory-based experiments, and then through discussion, we talked about how to apply these psychological principles to specific events. The students were eager to discuss their ideas in class, and their thought papers about the readings showed that they were just as eager to apply their new knowledge to their daily lives. For their final projects, many students chose to do a presentation in front of the class rather than write a paper. The presentations were excellent, and it was evident that they had been energized enough to read much more broadly than the assigned material.

As the advisor to undergraduate research assistants, I encourage them to take the “research” part of the title seriously, and to get more out of the experience than just a line on

their résumé. I involve them at all stages of the research process, from generating hypotheses to experimental design, from data analysis to the formation of a theoretical argument, and I look forward to mentoring both graduate and undergraduate students using the same model.

## **COURSE TOPICS**

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In addition to my work with undergraduate researchers and my experience teaching, I have also been a teaching assistant for a wide range of classes, including introductory psychology, social psychology, perception, emotions, negotiations, and research methods. My duties included meeting with students, leading review sections, grading papers and essays, constructing exam questions, advising student class research projects, and occasionally giving lectures or leading class discussions.

I would be especially interested in teaching seminar courses in my area of expertise, specifically courses on **automaticity**, and courses that take a **social-cognitive approach to the study of political behavior and decision-making**. More generally, I am also prepared to teach undergraduate classes in **social psychology**, **research methods**, **introductory statistics** and **social cognition**, and would enjoy **supervising undergraduate research**. I would also be quite willing to expand my teaching repertoire to meet the needs of the department.