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### Notes

1. Portions of this article were presented at the meeting of Best Practices in the Teaching of Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology, Atlanta, GA in October 2004.
2. We thank Randolph Smith and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback during the editorial process.
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## Supervision of New Instructors: Promoting a Rewarding First Experience in Teaching

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*This article provides suggestions for supervisors of new instructors. Topics include establishing a foundation for a rewarding teaching experience, giving advice to the new instructor on how to shape a course and manage time, and structuring consultation sessions to correct problems while preserving the novice teacher's confidence.*

Teaching a college course for the first time can be a tumultuous blend of excitement and uncertainty. That initial experience can heavily influence whether teaching will be part of a person's career aspirations. Increasingly, psychology programs have recognized the importance of training graduate students to teach (Meyers & Prieto, 2000a); approximately

two thirds of respondents in a recent survey now offer courses on teaching (Buskist, Tears, Davis, & Rodrigue, 2002).

My purpose in writing this article is to share observations gleaned from supervising a teaching of psychology course over the past 15 years. Although my comments are directed to faculty, I also provide suggestions for supervisors to give graduate students who are teaching their first college course. Beginning instructors may also find those comments helpful to read directly.

### Theoretical Context for Supervision

Prieto (2001) provided a useful model for understanding the development of new instructors and the accompanying roles of supervisors. Adapted from Stoltenberg, McNeill, and Delworth's (1998) approach to psychotherapy supervision, Prieto described the orientation and concerns of new instructors who are beginning graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), advanced GTAs, and junior faculty. Each stage is characterized by differences in awareness of self versus others, motivation, and autonomy. For example, beginning GTAs are (a) focused greatly on themselves rather than on their students; (b) highly motivated, although anxious; and (c) highly dependent on supervisors for direction. Advanced GTAs have better awareness of and empathy for their students' concerns, more ambivalence about teaching because of the high demands, and greater autonomy. The primary goal of the supervisor is to facilitate the new instructor's movement beyond the beginner stage.

### Foundation for a Positive Teaching Experience

Long before new instructors set foot in their classrooms, you can enhance the likelihood of an affirming experience by shaping how graduate students approach the content and style of their course.

### *Give Permission to Be Imperfect*

Becoming a good teacher is a developmental process, with few graduate students having the skills and experience needed to be an excellent instructor from the outset. Communicate that you are expecting improvement, but not perfection, as the term progresses. Many beginning teachers use a favorite professor as a model for their first attempt, while failing to realize that those respected abilities developed over time and with some failures (Sviniki, 1994). Early, explicit attention to your expectations counters the assumption of beginning instructors that their skills should be fully developed (Prieto, 2001).

### *Shape Their Expectations Through Readings*

Before reading the textbook and crafting a syllabus, beginning instructors should read concise articles on active learning (Bernstein, 1997), depth versus breadth of content coverage (Nelson, 2001), undergraduate students' perspectives on teaching (Grineski, 1999), and myths about learning to teach (Sviniki, 1994). The aim here is to encourage

thought about course goals before delving into the details of content. The readings also provide the structure needed by beginning teachers (Prieto, 2001).

### *Encourage Early Use of Several Techniques*

To counter the frequently held assumption that there is but one correct way to teach (Prieto, 2001), advocate that graduate students try a variety of teaching strategies in the first month of the semester and then settle on those techniques that mesh with the particular class and the new instructor's interpersonal style. For example, a class will more likely embrace interactive teaching that is introduced early rather than later in the term.

### *Use Active Learning in Training*

New instructors benefit from participatory learning just as their own undergraduate students do. Among the valuable techniques suggested by Meyers and Prieto (2000b) are observing other instructors, critiquing syllabi and tests, discussing ethics scenarios, and writing a teaching philosophy. Particularly useful is including an unstructured period during group supervision meetings in which instructors can share their successes and ask advice on problems. Meyers and Prieto noted that this activity normalizes the challenges of teaching, provides peer support, and offers solutions to instructional difficulties.

### **Advice to the New Instructor**

Several excellent sources offer practical suggestions for the beginning college instructor about how to conduct a specific class session (e.g., Buskist, 2000; Davis, 1993). For example, Buskist (2000) noted that new GTAs often rely too heavily on notes, speak while turned away from the class, and fail to reward student participation. My suggestions are more general in nature. Supervisors may provide the following suggestions to novice teachers.

### *Beware of Multimedia Overload*

Today's psychology textbooks come with an array of manuals, slides, DVDs, and Web sites. New instructors can become overwhelmed with the available resources. Because they must prepare each topic from scratch, beginning teachers should quickly identify a few "go-to" sources to check when they begin a new chapter. Limiting oneself can save valuable time and does not preclude a wider search when necessary.

### *Reduce the Textbook Coverage*

New teachers may not realize that most textbooks are exhaustively detailed to reach the broadest possible market. They should not feel compelled to cover every chapter or every fact because it is in the text. Instead, advise covering a few primary points in each chapter in depth in class with accompanying applications and discussion. Remind them that un-

dergraduate students can learn some important concepts on their own.

### *Carefully Plan Exams*

Recommend that instructors use an exam format that reflects the course goals. For example, fact-based multiple-choice tests often do not address the goal of promoting critical thinking. In addition, advise that they provide students with practice in class with the skills needed on the exams to reduce the pervasive anxiety about tests.

### *Address Diverse Learning Styles*

Most graduate students have thrived in a lecture environment and may not realize that other college students require different approaches. Recommend that new teachers change activities every 15 to 20 min to reset attention and accommodate the variety of ways that people learn.

### **Consultation**

Faculty involved in training not only supply materials on how to teach, they also help new instructors work through difficult situations and provide feedback on teaching performance. For the latter activities, a collaborative, rather than expert, approach is better for developing new teachers' skills and confidence (Carroll & Goldberg, 1989; Prentice-Dunn, Payne, & Ledbetter, in press). A collaborative approach provides sufficient structure to allay the new teacher's anxiety along with the encouragement to explore many options to create a personal teaching style. It guides the instructor away from the beginning stage in Prieto's (2001) typology and toward the advanced stage.

To correct problems while preserving the graduate student's emerging self-efficacy as a college teacher, consider the following pointers.

### *Be Aware of Self-Criticism*

New instructors do not give themselves enough credit. They tend to be overly critical and fail to see what they are doing well (Prieto, 2001). Overcome this tendency by praising all successes, especially early in the term. When possible, have graduate students observe fellow students who are also new to the teaching role. Novice teachers become less anxious and more focused on improvement when they see that their colleagues face similar challenges.

Because of their tendency to self-criticize, novice instructors may take unwarranted blame for a poor first exam performance. They gain a more accurate perception after surveying the class on the time and steps that students took to prepare for the test.

### *Use Multiple Sources of Feedback*

Ratings from the instructor's students can improve teaching if collected during the first half of the term (Cohen, 1980). In addition, new teachers consider narrative com-

ments about strengths and weaknesses to be especially valuable (McElroy & Prentice-Dunn, 2005). However, coach instructors to look for themes rather than focusing on individual negative or positive comments.

Another source of feedback is video. Prentice-Dunn and Pitts (2001) described several benefits, including seeing the class from the students' perspective. Video enables the viewer to alternate focus between broad themes and the details of teaching. Although novice teachers appreciate being able to watch the tape initially while alone, they need checklists (e.g., Davis, 1993) to focus attention on pedagogical issues rather than excessively on their appearance.

### *Structure the Consultation Session*

The consultation session integrates multiple feedback sources with self-observations. New instructors can review with an experienced instructor how well classroom content fits course objectives and also explore alternative ways to communicate course material. In one study, graduate students reported that such meetings improved their skills more than any other component of a teaching of psychology course (McElroy & Prentice-Dunn, 2005).

Prentice-Dunn et al. (in press) provided several suggestions for conducting consultation sessions. Among these recommendations are allowing the new instructor to take the lead in conversation, focusing on positive behaviors first, framing problems in terms of improvement, and helping the instructor set short-term teaching goals.

### *Recognize the Rhythms of the Semester*

Teaching for the first time can require an enormous amount of energy. Although beginning instructors are enthusiastic, their stamina tends to wane at midsemester due to the ever-present demands of course work, research, and clients. Acknowledge this fact and assist new instructors in recognizing it in themselves and in their students. Provide advice on how to continue to present enthusiastically and engage students.

Although many instructors do not reach Prieto's (2001) second developmental stage (i.e., advanced GTA) for one or two semesters, first-time teachers often display aspects of the advanced stage toward the end of their first teaching experience. Prieto characterized this stage as one of ambivalence. Assist instructors in placing teaching in the context of other demands on their professional and personal time. Help them explore the pros and cons of alternative instructional and grading practices as they begin to reflect on the closing semester and anticipate future courses.

### Conclusions

The initial teaching experience establishes strategies and attitudes that can follow the new instructor for years. Faculty members who conduct training workshops and supervise teaching of psychology courses play a vital role in determining what direction that first experience will take. Careful attention to our role can make the first college course not a

chore to be persevered, but rather a self-affirming activity that simultaneously benefits a classroom of students.

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### Notes

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