Highlights from Final Instructor Evaluation Fall 2018 Abnormal Psychology

Note 1: The way I have constructed the online abnormal psychology course focuses on *high student contact and engagement*. Despite the course being online, I want the students to feel known, to create a supportive community in which students know that I am available to them in every way that will help them be successful. I provide a tremendous amount of feedback to students in multiple ways; I often start the module with a video introduction of the material they will be working with and how it connects to the overall themes of the course, I provide written feedback on each individual assignment, and after I have graded the entire set of assignments and quizzes for a module I post "mini lectures" via the announcments feature reflecting on important points that emerged from class discussions and their assignments as a whole. All of this communication and engagement with students is of course, extraordinarily time-consuming. During the semester it is hard to tell if the many hours I spend communicating in these ways makes a difference to students. At the end of the semester I am always touched and humbled by the feedback students provide to me regarding my teaching, which is where I can see that my high contact approach really does make a difference for them.

Note 2: The competencies for this course are to teach the set of current mental illness diagnoses, symptoms, treatments, etc. It is my personal mission as a practicing psychologist to infuse this otherwise dry material with a *broader understanding of mental health and mental illness* as something equally affecting all of us, a continuum on which we all slide over the course of a lifetime instead of a category that allows the dehumanization of people suffering with mental illnesses and supports stigma around mental illness as happening to "other people". I focus on developing *students’ ability to think critically about issues around mental health, mental illness, stigma, and cultural/contextual factors.* The course is challenging because I am asking students to constantly think differently, to step away from what they think they know or popular cultural concepts of mental illness and considerate from an entirely different paradigm. I am humbled at the end of class when I can really see students not just demonstrating their ability to think critically and independently but also their meta-cognition of this as a skill they built over the course of the semester.

Note 3: These "highlights" are taken verbatim from a final student reflection assignment given at the very end of the course as an instructor evaluation and course feedback. Students are instructed that they will get full points for completing the assignment, that the content of their reflections does not impact their grade for the assignment, and they are invited to give both positive and negative feedback to improve the course. While all of these comments are positive in nature, I assure you that this is not by design; there was no negative feedback in the student reflections at all. I have attached a PDF of the entire discussion board with each student's full responses to the five questions. I selected these responses to share in this consolidated version to highlight comments that specifically address my primary goals and outcomes for the class.

**1.Overall, what did you think of the course?**

* Overall, some modules were exceptionally challenging because we had to think critically when answering the questions for those assignments. I had expected this course to be challenging so this course was just what I had expected.
* In all honestly I am not fond of online classes, but I did take your Psychology 101 online class and the structure of the course made it easier to enjoy and keep up with. It was the same with this course the structure made it easier to follow and the material was fun to learn about. Overall this course was awesome.
* The way the material was presented was amazing and made learning this so much easier. I really appreciate that the work is not just pages from a textbook but actually videos and articles that are fun to read. If I could take this class again, I would! You were an amazing teacher and very easy to understand. Even though this was an online course I never felt as though you were a stranger. Thank you!
* Overall, this course was a bit challenging in a couple units or modules since it was sometimes about critically thinking
* I think this course had very interesting content and made me love doing the assignments.
* Overall the course was very engaging and was a breath of fresh air. My personal track towards my degree has been slow, working full time and taking a couple classes each semester, and this course helped break the “read, quiz, essay” cycle that many classes fall into.
* **….**a lot of the material challenged my way of thinking.

**2. Recognizing that it was built to be *challenging*without being impossible, *rigorous* without being discouraging, how would you rate the class in terms of challenge, rigor, and difficulty?**

* I do feel as though it challenges you mentally and will make anyone who takes it (psych fan or not) think critically and potentially view things in ways they have never viewed them before. Or perhaps find within themselves a different perspective of the self and gain some self awareness of certain aspects  of themselves and that is always a challenging thing I think.
* I think this class was not as challenging as I thought due to how rigorous it was. I really liked how every module contained various methods of learning the lesson. I think this is what made it less difficult. From the articles to documentaries, YouTube videos, and TedTalks. The difficulty was very minimal, yet when it was, there was always something further offered to help clarify the question or assignment.
* I actually appreciated the way we were challenged to think out side the box and how our opinions and thoughts were welcomed.
* Challenging but not impossible, Rigorous but not discouraging; that is the perfect explanation for what this course was.
* I was never discouraged throughout the semester simply because I knew if I needed help all I had to do was ask for it. Knowing that you have that support there when you need it is extremely helpful, even if you never ask for it.
* I felt the coursework was challenging without being frustrating. I’ve taken courses in the past where the instructor would pick one extreme, either too easy or incredibly difficult, and not offer any engagement to guide the students. This makes the lessons seem like a points game where you just try to figure out a way to skate through. Learning is much more than just reading and taking a quiz or regurgitating vocabulary. Feedback from the instructor is integral to being able to understand why you may have missed the point on a certain topic or elaborate on the topics that you initially excel at and our feedback in this course was a great help.
* This class was challenging and rigorous to be sure, but I did not find it to be discouraging or impossible by any means.
* I always felt encouraged.
* The class is very challenging and if was my first course that I have taken at a collegiate level in which my professor required me to be able to reflect on material given then I may have found it more challenging. I think it is structured in a way that it isn't too overwhelming and very doable and also very rewarding.
* I really liked how the underlying message to the whole class was that people who have mental illnesses are not evil or what media usually portrays them to be. They are people that have difficulties just like everyone else. The media shows a version that can honestly make others have a distaste for mental illness patients. This class was amazing and instead taught us why people are the way they are and we can sympathize.
* I don’t think it was difficult in the sense of amount of course work. I do feel as though it challenges you mentally and will make anyone who takes it (psych fan or not) think critically and potentially view things in ways they have never viewed them before. Or perhaps find within themselves a different perspective of the self and gain some self awareness of certain aspects  of themselves and that is always a challenging thing I think.

**3.What were the best and worst features of the class?**

* The best feature of this course was easily the feedback and follow up after the lessons. I felt that the information stuck more when the reference material and assignments were elaborated on in the lesson feedback. The comments on assignments were very helpful as well to let me know if I was heading in the right direction or needed to make some adjustments.
* The best feature I believe or aspect in the case I enjoyed was how ordered and structured the class was, as my micro class is horribly all over the place. I liked the communication with announcements and comments for sure.
* The best features of the class was the way you introduced topics through many different styles like watching videos or movies, reading articles, power-points, and us doing assessments on ourselves. I don't think there was any worst feature of the class besides it being a little challenging at times understanding the assignments or articles.
* Also, the amount of work you put into grading everyone's work and sending out a mass reply on the subject to answer common questions was amazing and always full of information. So, thank you for that.
* I believe that the best part about the class was the constant feedback from the professor, this allowed me to see the flaws in my responses and review the valid points I made before. This became helpful whenever the professor would make a big announcement to the class explaining the module through the learning material presented then because out helped me understand what I hadn't before. Not to mention  it also helped me see some interesting ideas raised by other classmates.

**4.What information will you take forward with you to apply to your professional, academic, and personal goals?**

* This course also emphasized that a mentally ill person or a diagnosis should not be perceived to be a certain individual. Often times, people picture a person to act a certain way and it leads to cloud the reality and definition of a mentally ill person.
* This class definitely has caused me to do more self reflecting. I think it is absolutely vital to be very self aware in any psychological endeavor because your own assumptions can effect those around you immensely. Definitely an increase of patience to that which I do not fully understand.
* Academically having to always think critically when completing these assignments has made me start to think critically when completing all my assignments for all of my classes.
* One of the key aspects of this course was learning to be completely objective about the world of psychology and putting personal stigmas aside in order to evaluate and learn about certain individuals and disorders. I want to continue to grow with this characteristic, as it has helped me see the world through a more analytical lens and permits me to be a part of something larger - as I can then put my own thoughts aside and aid others in their experience. I look forward to used this characteristic in not only my academic and professional goals, but in my personal life as well; there seems to be a lot of ways in which my negative perspective can definitely impact the way I react to a situation or how willing I am to grow and learn from someone else.
* The information I will take forward with me is the amount of work and knowledge I put into my assignments to look back to them in the future as a refresher. The work will definitely benefit me in the long run, specifically I am now more aware of how the world is regarding to the numerous disorders.
* This course definitely helped me to talk a walk in other people's shoes who may be suffering from a disorder. It was amazing to watch some of the videos and read the autobiography for the book report and wish everyone would have to take this course if they are interacting with people on the daily.

**5.What else do you want me to know?**

* That your comments made my day
* I found the feedback on our assignments to be very useful because you demonstrate your knowledge on a more personal level. You are also very easy to reach and contact back when needed.
* I think you’re an amazing teacher (fair, encouraging and happy to teach) The educational system on all levels needs more teachers who actually know how to teach, who are patient, understanding of life, and do not simply just go by a text book or their own personal ideals of what is “correct”. Thank you again for a great semester :)
* I have a significant amount of this course written down for my own good so I can always look back if I have any questions. Mostly, I  just want to say thank you and I appreciate how you did this for us and taught us this course.
* You were one of my favorite professors, thank you so much for helping me succeed in the course!
* Thank you for your announcements, lecture videos, mini-lecture announcements after modules, feedback and comments in the assignment section. I don’t take that extra time you give us with a grain of salt. I too, appreciate different viewpoints, compliments, and constructive feedback. I have always said if you don’t know what you are doing wrong, how can you learn from your mistakes? I appreciated your personal video lectures. It helped give this online course a traditional classroom feel.
* I just want you to know that the way you have this course set up is fantastic. Not once did I find this class boring (how I used to find my classes before I switched majors). The sources you selected for teaching were a great choice that made it relatable to understand.
* I would like you to know that I appreciate your teaching style. When taking an online class it can be difficult to get a feel for your professor, or to feel that they genuinely care about your success. I didn’t have that issue during this course. You made announcements often and when someone posed a question you felt we could all learn from, you brought that to our attention as well. I especially liked the feedback you left after grading. Whether I was awarded full or partial points, you let me know why and I welcomed that input. It was a pleasure, Professor Van.
* Just wanted to thank you for making this both and interesting and engaging course filled with lots of useful information and the appropriate notes, videos, articles, feedback and presentations that were provided in order to assist with the work.
* Thank you for your good and consistent feedback throughout the class.
* I just want you to know that I loved this class and that I appreciate you for teaching it and doing an amazing job in the process.
* Theres oohing else that I want you to know. Your class was amazing and I learned a lot. I would definitely keep the format the same because everything was very smooth and was easy for me as a student to follow everything.
* I feel that this class was one that I definitely learned more from than most of my other classes thus far in my academic career.
* In all other regards, I really appreciated the interactive feedback that you gave with assignments and discussion boards. It was easy to relate to you and feel that you were a part of the class since I received so much interaction with you.
* I appreciate how thought-provoking the assignments were.