Mark Schurgin

Teaching Statement

In my research career, I have learned to place an emphasis on sharing science broadly through training, education, and mentorship. For my consistently high reviews as an instructor and TA, I was awarded the Walter L. Clark Teaching Awarded by Johns Hopkins University upon graduating in 2017.

Teaching Experience

I am passionate about teaching, and as a result my experiences at Hopkins went beyond the typical teaching load of a graduate student. I have taught in numerous courses as a teaching assistant, which have ranged from large, lecture-based courses (Intro to Cognitive Psychology), to writing-intensive courses that required one-to-one interactions with students (Mind, Brain & Experience), to courses that required me to lead my own seminar groups of over twenty students (Research Methods in Experimental Psychology). I also have experience as a teaching assistant for an upper-level graduate course (Advanced Statistical Methods), which allowed me to gain experience in how to help extremely advanced students learn highly specific and technical topics.

All this previous experience culminated into the development of a 3-credit undergraduate course (The Illusion of Perception), for which I was awarded the Dean's Teaching Fellowship (a highly competitive fellowship awarded to a select few graduate students among hundreds of applications) and taught during Fall 2017. Overall, the course was extremely well received by the students, with an overall course evaluation of 5.00/5.00 (higher than any other course in the Psychological and Brain Sciences Department that year), and comments such as: "this is one of the best courses I have ever taken at Hopkins". As a post-doc at UCSD I was invited to give several guest lectures in neuroscience and cognitive psychology courses, and last fall I taught Cognitive Foundations, a large introductory course to over 300 students, and received the highest professor rating that quarter in the department (98.1%).

Mentoring

I have had the opportunity to mentor dozens of undergraduates on specific empirical projects within psychology. These experiences have led me to appreciate how rewarding mentoring is, and how important it is to involve undergraduates in high-caliber research (something I will strive to do in my own lab). As a post-doc at UCSD, multiple students under my mentorship received awards for their research, including the Ronald E. McNair Scholarship by the Federal TRIO Program and the URS Chancellor's Research Scholarship by UCSD. Of the 8 undergraduates I mentored for an extended period of time while a post-doc, 5 are now graduate students in Psychology Ph.D. programs.

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching style has been shaped by designing and teaching an undergraduate course, and giving lectures and serving as a teaching assistant at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Through these experiences I have developed an approach that directly engages students with research in a way that is broadly appealing. Whenever possible, I seek to integrate primary literature into lectures, assignments and discussion in order to build student's abilities to critically evaluate ideas and scientific discourse. I also place an emphasis on real-world applications through in-class demonstrations and assignments designed to foster critical thinking of how students might apply what they learned outside of the classroom.

In my experience, the greatest barrier undergraduates face is the perspective that the knowledge and skills any science course may provide are extremely narrow, and may not apply to their future majors or career paths should their interests change. In my teaching, I have sought to address this issue by including broad themes and a diverse range of topics that will appeal to a variety of student majors, as well as a course structure that enables critical thinking of course topics in relation to a student's own interests.

Future Teaching Interests

I am prepared and excited to teach courses in Psychology, Cognitive Psychology, Cognitive Neuroscience, Sensation and Perception, Memory, Research Methods, and Statistics. Each of these courses could be given at an introductory or advanced level, with advanced courses focusing more on primary source materials. I am also looking forward to the opportunity to lead undergraduate and graduate-level seminars on topics in areas of visual memory, perception and illusions, and other topics in visual cognition and learning.