Lucinda S. Baker
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My approach to teaching is very much intertwined with my life-long love of learning, which is evidenced by my having spent nearly two decades of my adult life as an undergraduate and graduate student. I've had the good fortune to have a number of wonderful teachers who inspired me with their enthusiasm and vast stores of knowledge, and part of why I'm enthusiastic about teaching is because I have the potential to provide a similar experience to the occasional student of mine. Often as I'm preparing a lecture I learn, or re-learn, some piece of information that I'd forgotten, and that is very rewarding to me as I sit alone at my desk reading.

My goal as a teacher is to introduce students to a chosen set of information, discuss why that information is important, useful, interesting, try to relate it to a common human perspective or experience that most of the students have had, and encourage them to think about ways that the given information relates to someone or some experience in their lives. The courses I've taught or been a teaching assistant for lend themselves well to this approach: human neuroanatomy, human anatomy and physiology, physiological psychology, and human sensation and perception are all essentially about how our human bodies and minds function or malfunction. The topics are intrinsically interesting, and the potential for "a-ha!" moments is great because so much of the material covered is really all about you and me, and how can that not be interesting? Often my objective is to encourage students to think about how the material being covered relates to their personal experiences, or those of someone they
know, and to engage them in discussion about their relevant, personal examples of the topic being considered. This has been possible because most of the college courses in which I've gotten teaching experience have had small enrollments. Obviously this approach wouldn't be ideal for large classes, or courses in many other disciplines.

I believe that when students can connect a given concept or explanation to a personal experience, they encode the information in a more elaborate, deeper memory, and thus they "learn" this material differently than they would something that is not connected to personal experience. While making personal connections is often possible in lecture courses, I love the lab courses I've been able to teach, because there we can provide the personal experiences to illustrate many of the central concepts of the course, and students are able to form much more elaborate, complex information webs for their new knowledge.

In a lecture format class it isn't usually possible to schedule activities for all students to test some aspect of their perception, for example, but when I am able to think of a relevant demonstration I always try to include it. I also try to change the pace of a class session, or intersperse different activities across the class period, as attention spans start to decline after about 20 minutes on a good day. For example, if there is a video or online demonstration that's relevant to the topic, I'll insert that into a lecture. I've been known to bring bones to class to pass around, anything that might give more information and illustrate well one of the concepts we're discussing. Also I'll let the students work in pairs or small
groups to generate ideas or examples sometimes, to add another dimension to their classroom experience.

Another habit I’ve acquired since my enrollment in GS 792 is to give a brief quiz periodically in class, maybe just 2 or 3 questions, but ones that require recollection of terms or concepts rather than just recognition. I believe that this helps students know which terms and concepts I consider most important, and it helps them to recall and review. I usually give a number of these quizzes, unannounced, and then record the five highest grades for each student that semester. This idea comes straight from cognitive psychology, is known as the testing effect, and as it has been shown to correlate with better test performance, I do it in hopes that better test performance also correlates with better learning.

I’ve also incorporated an opportunity for students to give me feedback about the pace of the course, the amount of material being covered, and any other feedback they wish to provide, about half way through each course I teach, so that I can adjust and improve the second half of a course if need be. I either ask for this feedback at the end of a quiz or an exam typically, or as a note at the end of an assignment. I think this shows students that I do care about their learning experience and value their opinions, and it gives them a greater sense of participation in the course.

One last concept that I try to bear in mind at all times has to do with individual differences and the need to be respectful of them in the classroom. Much of the material I teach, particularly about sensation and perception, is characterized by a range of sensitivities or abilities, and this fact provides a
reason to bring up repeatedly the fact that we are all different, that our abilities change across our individual lifespans, and that some of us are naturally more sensitive to certain types of sensory inputs than others of us, and that's the normal state of affairs for the human race. I believe that pointing this out often contributes to greater awareness and acceptance of individual differences, even in a lecture course where we're not comparing how long each of us can balance on a balance board for example.

Much of what I consider my teaching philosophy is specifically based on the types of courses I've had the good fortune to teach at CSU. In the future I may need to design courses to teach very different types of material. I've learned about many resources available to help me in that undertaking during the workshops I've attended, and from the lectures in GS 792, so I feel like I'll have a selection of approaches and ideas to use to teach different types of courses in the future.